

Twelve Saints and Martyrs of the 20th Century



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English Language Study for Russian Orthodox Learners

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Contents

St. Ambrose of Optina.....	1
St. Elizabeth, Grand Duchess of Russia and New Martyr.....	3
St. John of Kronstadt.....	5
Blessed John the Wonderworker.....	7
St. Luke, Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea.....	9
Blessed Matrona of Moscow.....	12
St. Nicholas of Serbia, Bishop of Zhicha.....	14
Blessed Nina, New Martyr.....	16
Venerable Silouan of Athos, Monk and Ascetic.....	18
St. Zachariah, Archbishop of Voronezh and Zadonsk.....	20
Heiromartyrs Peter Karelin and Hermogenes Dolganyov.....	22

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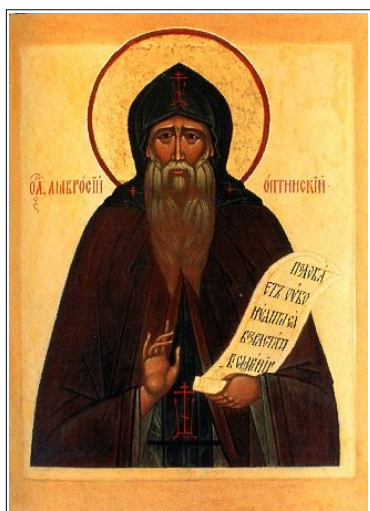
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Twelve Saints and Martyrs of the 20th Century

St. Ambrose of Optina, Hieromonk

(†1891)

Commemoration Days: July 10, October 23, October 24



The Hermitage of Optina, situated at the edge of deep forests in the Kaluga Region, was the center of Russian spiritual renewal in the 19th century. The Hermitage became known for its holy monks or staretsy, who led an ascetic life and practiced the ancient tradition of contemplative prayer. God deemed them worthy of the gifts of prophecy, healing and clairvoyance. Hundreds of people in search of salvation came to Optina to receive spiritual guidance. All fourteen monks who lived in the Monastery were glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church.

Among them was Fr. Ambrose.

Hieromonk Ambrose was born Alexander in 1812 in a village of the Tambov region to Michael Grenkov, a sexton, and his wife, Martha. He was the sixth of eight children. Alexander's grandfather was a priest. The boy, brought up in a strict but loving family, learned to read early and liked to sing in the church choir. A lively and gregarious child, Alexander had many friends and stood at the top of his class. Study came to him with no effort. As one of the best pupils in the Tambov clerical school, he was sent to the Seminary. A year before graduation, Alexander became so dangerously ill he promised God that, if he recovered, he would be tonsured as a monk. The illness passed, but the young man delayed fulfilling of his vow – although he never forgot it. He spent a few years as a tutor for a rich family and later as a Greek teacher in a clerical school in Lipetsk.

In 1839 Alexander Grenkov went on a pilgrimage to the Troitsa-Sergiev Monastery, and then – having firmly decided to forsake the world – quietly, without telling his friends, departed for Optina.

As a novice, Alexander worked in the monastery bakery and served as staretz Leo's cell assistant and reader. In 1842 Alexander was tonsured and given the name Ambrose, in honor of St. Ambrose of Milan. Bodily infirmities trained the spirit of the future great staretz. Never a healthy man, Fr. Ambrose all his life suffered one malady after another. Once, he

became so weak that he was prepared to die. But, as he would say later, “In a monastery, the sick do not die soon, as long as the sickness brings them real benefit.”

In spite of physical weakness, which kept him bedridden most of the time, Fr. Ambrose every day received crowds of people and answered dozens of letters. Russian intelligentsia, struggling with doubts and loss of direction, often sought his guidance. Leo Tolstoy and Fyodor Dostoevsky came to the holy staretz for comfort and advice. A man who in the past had loved worldly things so much, Fr. Ambrose well understood the spiritual thirst of his visitors. He saw into the depths of their souls.

In the last years of the saint’s life, with his help and blessings, a convent was built not far from Optina – with a school, hospital, orphanage and almshouse. The convent accepted sick, blind and destitute women and, by 1890, about a thousand nuns lived there. It also was the place where Fr. Ambrose drew his last breath. While visiting, he had become very ill and couldn’t return to Optina.

At his end-time, the holy man’s pain was intense as never before. He lost his voice and hearing. After much suffering, on October 10, 1891, in the presence of monks from Optina, St. Ambrose crossed himself with great difficulty and fell asleep in the Lord.

From the Sayings of Fr. Ambrose

- The Lord will deliver you from all improper thoughts; just humble yourself.
- Do not be greatly disturbed by the arrangement of your fate. Have an unwavering desire for salvation and, standing before God, await His help until the time comes.
- Let us live more simply, and God will have mercy on us.
- We must begin with thanksgiving for everything. The beginning of joy is to be content with your situation.
- Why are people bad? Because they forget that God is over them.

St. Elizabeth, Grand Duchess of Russia and New Martyr

(†1918)

Commemoration Days: February 7, July 18

The life of St. Elizabeth, Grand Duchess of Russia, embodies Christ's commandment, "love thy neighbour," in the most perfect and pure way.

Elizabeth, the second of seven children, was born in 1864 to Louis IV, Grand-Duke of Hessen-Darmstadt, and Princess Alice of the United Kingdom, daughter of Queen Victoria.

When Elizabeth was fourteen, an outbreak of diphtheria killed her mother and youngest sister. The orphaned girl was raised by her grandmother, Queen Victoria, and spent many years in

England. Called Ella by her family, she grew into a beautiful young princess – highly intelligent, lively, compassionate, and very pious. Having declined several suitors, in 1884 she married the son of Emperor Alexander II of Russia, Grand Duke Serge.

The Grand Duchess quickly adjusted to her new home and learned to speak fluent Russian with only a slight accent. In the beginning of her married life, Elizabeth continued to attend Protestant services but felt a great attraction to the faith of her husband. After much contemplation and study, she converted to the Orthodox faith, despite the disapproval of her English and German relatives. Only Queen Victoria supported her granddaughter's decision.

Both Elizabeth and her husband were involved in charity work. Serge helped the Russian Orthodox Mission in Palestine, building schools and orphanages for Arab Christians. When he was appointed the Governor of Moscow, Elizabeth, as the first lady, worked to improve the living conditions of the poor and hungry. The couple, unable to have children of their own, adopted Serge's niece and nephew.

In February of 1905 Elizabeth's life changed forever. Her husband was killed by a bomb in a political assassination. Close to the place of the explosion, Elizabeth saw the body and, kneeling on the snow, helped gather Serge's remains. Deeply shocked and affected by the tragedy, she spent days in ceaseless prayer and later visited her husband's murderer in prison, begging him to repent, saying she had forgiven him. Elizabeth asked for mercy for



the assassin from the government. She had her husband's gravestone inscribed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

Elizabeth withdrew from her former social life completely. She sold all her jewelry and expensive clothes and moved out of the palace. On a large piece of land she had purchased, the Duchess founded the Convent of Saints Martha and Mary. The nuns established a rent-free hostel for female workers and students, free hospital, clinic, school for nurses, library, and soup kitchen. Elizabeth took care of abandoned children and brought food to poor families, often visiting the most dangerous parts of Moscow. By 1910, the Convent became home to 45 nuns, and Elizabeth was chosen to be the abbess. During the First World War, the sisters helped wounded soldiers in hospitals. Elizabeth was respected and loved throughout Russia.

When the Revolution of 1917 came, the nuns stopped neither their worship nor their service. For Elizabeth, as a member of the royal family, it was very unsafe to stay in Russia. Her brother-in-law, Tsar Nicholas II, abdicated the throne and, together with his family, was placed under house arrest. The Grand Duchess had a chance to escape but turned down all offers, saying that she would never abandon her sisters in Christ. On Pascha 1918, Red Army soldiers broke into the Convent. Elizabeth and her close companion, Sister Barbara, who refused to leave the Abbess, were arrested and taken first to Yekaterinburg and then to the town of Alapayevsk nearby. Together with five members of the imperial family and their secretary, the Grand Duchess and Sister Barbara stayed in a school house on the edge of town.

On the night of July 5, the prisoners, beaten and blindfolded, were taken to a place in the woods and executed. The first to die was Grand Duke Sergei Mikhailovich, grandson of Nicholas I: he was shot when he tried to fight back. The others were pushed into a mine shaft, with grenades tossed in after them. The martyrs didn't die immediately, but lived for several hours more. Local villagers who came to the shaft after the murderers had left heard the singing of Christian hymns coming deep from underground.

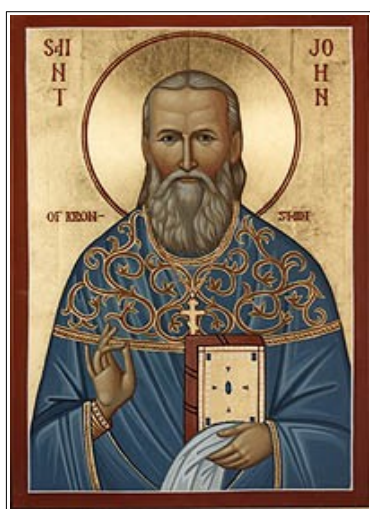
When the White Army liberated Alapayevsk, the soldiers recovered the bodies. They discovered that Elizabeth, before she died, tried to dress the wounds of Grand Duke John. On her chest she held the icon of Christ given to her by her husband on the day of her baptism.

Long before her death, the Grand Duchess had expressed a wish to be buried in Palestine. With great effort, Victoria, Elizabeth's older sister, transported the body of the martyred Abbess to the Middle East. In 1921 members of the Russian, Greek and Arab clergy received the relics and placed them in the Church of St. Mary Magdalene. To this day, the relics are kept there, and Christians from all over the world come to venerate them.

St. John of Kronstadt

(†1908)

Commemoration Days: February 7, October 19, December 20



Located on a small island in the Gulf of Finland, west of Saint Petersburg, Kronstadt was unlike any other place in Russia. The city-port had quite an infamous reputation. Its population comprised mostly of sailors, unskilled workers and deported criminals. Many were homeless and slept on the street. Theft, extreme poverty and moral corruption were wide-spread. Women often couldn't feed and clothe their children. Men, unable to provide for their families, resorted to drinking. Such was the cruel reality of life in Kronstadt – where, in 1855, a newly-ordained priest, Fr. John, started his ministry. He came to help the most desperate find God.

John was born in a small village in the Arkhangelsk region, in the north of the Russian Empire, to deacon Ilia Sergiev and his wife, Theodora. At birth, the baby was so weak that his parents, fearing for their son's survival, baptized him on the same day.

Ilia Sergiev's family was poor, and his children knew deprivation from their early years. John, his first born, was a quiet child who liked to spend time by himself, thinking and observing the life around him. When John was ten, his parents collected enough money to send him to a parish school in Arkhangelsk. At first, learning came to John with much difficulty, and his grades were the lowest in the class. John was greatly troubled by this, understanding that his parents' last resources went for his education. He prayed to God for help in his studies and continued to work hard. Gradually, John Sergiev not only caught up with the other boys, but surpassed them, becoming the top pupil in the school.

John never questioned what direction in life to take: like his father and grandfather before him, he wanted to serve God. Since he was academically gifted, the state paid for his study at Saint Petersburg Academy. Parish priests were expected to be married, and John, following the tradition, wed before he left the Academy. He and his wife, Elizabeth, cared for each other like brother and sister. The vow of chastity John made in his youth, he kept all his life. After his ordination, twenty-six-year-old Fr. John was appointed to serve in St. Andrew's Cathedral of Kronstadt.

The new priest's unusual ministry quickly drew attention and curiosity. Traveling door to door, he talked to people, comforted them, brought food for their children, and paid for their medical needs. The hostility, which some felt towards Fr. John, turned to trust and respect. One man remembered: "I came home drunk and angry as usual, and saw the priest there. I wanted to throw him out, but he said softly, "You are blessed with such a good wife and beautiful children. Why do you drink?" His eyes looked into my very soul, and I felt ashamed."

Knowing of his kindness, crowds of beggars followed Fr. John everywhere. He gave away his money and food, leaving very little for his wife and himself. But that did not solve the problem: men need to work to keep their dignity. Fr. John started looking for benefactors for the Love-of-Work House – a place where the poor could live and work, completely providing for themselves. Many well-to-do people donated to the project, and, in 1882, construction of a large complex was completed. In addition to workshops, it contained a school, library, dormitory, orphanage, dining area, and health clinic. The workers were trained to make ropes for ships, carton boxes and envelopes. They were paid 19-20 kopecks a day. Dinner cost about 4 kopecks, a place in the dormitory – 3 kopecks per night. Men and women of all religions and nationalities were welcome in the House. Fr. John's help was never limited to the Orthodox only. He loved everybody, and often prayed together with Muslim Tartars.

Fr. John celebrated the Eucharist every day, which was very unusual. On a daily basis, more than 5,000 people came to receive communion. Unable to hear each individual confession of such a multitude, Fr. John introduced the practice of mass confession. Standing side-by-side, church-goers shouted out their sins, neither hearing nor judging what

others were saying. This public cleansing of souls felt like the entire city was ridding itself of vice.

Such uncommon methods attracted much criticism from Church authorities, who thought that Fr. John was changing the rules of the Orthodox Church. But poor people loved their priest dearly, and his fame as a healer spread over Russia. People from all corners of the vast Empire came to Fr. John for his advice and blessing.

Indifferent to both praise and accusations, Fr. John continued serving until his final days. He peacefully reposed in the Lord on December 20th, 1908.

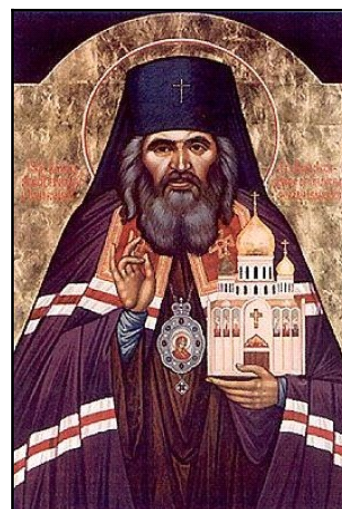
Blessed John the Wonderworker

(†1966)

Commemoration Days: February 7, July 2

Blessed John the Wonderworker was born on June 4, 1896 in the village of Adamovka in Southern Russia. A weak and unhealthy child, he would be a tower of strength for the poor and a source of comfort for the afflicted. Both peacemaker and protector, Vladika helped many people through his spiritual vision and prayers.

During his early years, Blessed John read the lives of many saints and studied diligently in school. After the Russian Civil War, he and his family relocated to Belgrade where he graduated



in theology at the University of Belgrade. In 1926 Vladika became a monk and was ordained hierodeacon in the Milkov Monastery. Later on, he taught courses in religion at the Serbian State High School and worked as an instructor at the Serbian Seminary of St. John.

Blessed John quickly rose to the rank of Bishop and then Archbishop. His parishioners recognized that he was no ordinary person. Vladika led the life of a holy ascetic: eating once a day at 11 p.m., praying constantly, serving the Divine Liturgy daily, and sleeping in a sitting position only one or two hours in the early morning. He possessed the gift of clairvoyance, which he used for the benefit of others. Many people were healed by his prayers.

In 1934 Archbishop John was transferred to Shanghai where he served a large population of Russian refugees. Upon his arrival, he restored harmony in the Church and established contacts with Ukrainians, Serbs and Greeks. An orphanage was built that rescued 3,500 homeless street children. During the Japanese occupation, when it was dangerous to be out at night, Vladika visited the sick at all hours, and no harm ever came to him. When the communists came to power, Vladika organized the evacuation of thousands of people to an island in the Philippines. As a result of his visit to Washington D.C., the United States Congress passed legislation that made possible their immigration to the United States.

After serving in Paris and Brussels, Father John was sent to San Francisco at the request of many Russians who had known him in China. Suffering slander and persecution, he ended a bitter controversy in the Church community. He bore all accusations without complaining or judging others. A San Francisco court in 1963 cleared the name of Father John and found him innocent of all wrong-doing. The construction of the Holy Virgin Cathedral of San Francisco was soon completed. In 1949 Archbishop John founded the parish of the Russian Orthodox Cathedral of St. John the Baptist in Washington D.C.

Sometime before his passing, Saint John gave hints of his approaching death. Until the end, he led a life of righteousness in harmony with God's laws.

God chose to make His strength known through a weak, bent man who could not speak clearly. Wondrous are His ways.

You are the God Who works wonders; You have made known Your strength among the peoples. - Psalms 76:15

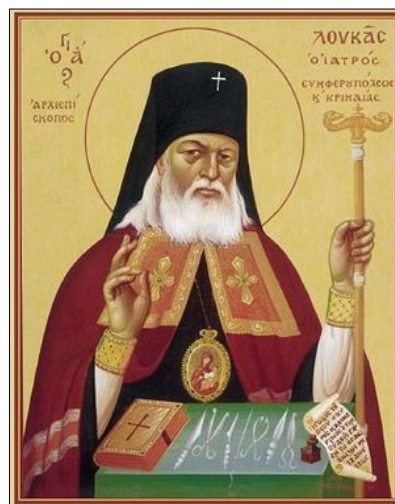
St. Luke, Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea

(†1961)

Scientist, Surgeon, Doctor of Medicine, Confessor of the Faith

Commemoration Days: March 18, May 29, June 11

The future Saint Luke, the Blessed Surgeon, was born on April 27th, 1877 to an impoverished family in eastern Crimea. The boy, christened Valentin, was the third of five children. His father Felix Voino-Yasenetsky, a civil servant, was a devout Polish Catholic. All the children were raised Orthodox in accordance with their mother's faith. As a child, Valentin did not receive an extensive religious training. But he was a thinking youth who tried to understand the world around him. The New Testament, given to Valentin as a gift at his school graduation, soon became his favourite book and guidance in life.



Learning wasn't difficult for Valentin. He had a great memory, analytical mind and ability to concentrate for hours. In his school and, later, at the University, Valentin was always the best student. A person of many talents, he could make excellent drawings of people. This talent he would use later in his study of anatomy.

In 1903 Valentin graduated from Kiev University Medical School with highest honours. Many opportunities lay in front of the young man, but he chose to be a village doctor to help the poor. His main professional interest was in ophthalmology – the study of the eye.

In 1904, during the Russo-Japanese war, Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky volunteered to serve in the Red Cross. He went to the Far East and, in the town of Chita, worked in a military hospital as head of the surgery department. There, he met nurse Anna Lansky who, for her kindness and high moral standards, the soldiers called “a holy nurse.” Valentin and Anna married.

After the war, Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky continued his work as a village doctor in Simbirsk, Saratov, Vladimir and Kursk regions. He performed hundreds of surgeries on the brain, heart, eye, colon, kidneys and spine. He developed many new techniques, completely unknown for his time, including procedures for the treatment of serious eye conditions. Dr.

Voino-Yasenetsky restored vision to a great number of people. His methods are still studied and used by eye doctors today.

Hospitals in the beginning of the 20th century only started to use general anesthesia. It was often more dangerous than the operation itself. When Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky was only 29, he developed a new, much safer method – local anesthesia of the sciatic nerve.

During World War I, seeing much suffering among his countrymen, Valentin started to attend church regularly. His Christian faith – which he so strongly experienced as a young man – now became firm and unshakable. In his operating room, Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky always kept an icon of the Holy Mother of God.

In 1917 Dr. Voino-Yasenetsky served as head doctor in a Tashkent hospital. Much loved by his patients and respected by other doctors, he continued to improve his surgical skills and taught at a local Medical school. He once said about the art of surgery: “A surgeon should have the eye of an eagle, the heart of a lion and the hand of a woman.”

In 1919 Valentin suffered a great personal loss. Anna, his beloved wife and mother of his four children, died of tuberculosis. Valentin didn't want to remarry and, following the calling of his heart – at a time when the strength of his Christian character was tested in blood – made the decision to step on the path of serving God.

In 1921 Valentin Voino-Yasenetsky was ordained a priest. Two years later, he became a monk and bishop, receiving the name of St. Luke the Evangelist, the Apostle who was a doctor, scholar and painter. Bishop Luke's first arrest came almost immediately. A supporter of Patriarch Tikhon, he was sent to prison in Tashkent. He was accused of “being a counter-revolutionary, an English spy,” and, as a doctor, of “giving bad treatment to the soldiers of the Red Army.”

While in prison, the Blessed Surgeon didn't stop working. He wrote an article about purulent surgery, which later became “the gold standard” for doctors. (In 1936 Bishop Luke received the title of Doctor of Medical Science for this work.)

After his Tashkent arrest, Vladyka was sent to Butyrka, the worst prison in Moscow. He was interrogated for hours with a bright lamp shining in his eyes. In the small cell where the torturers threw him, there were 30 to 40 other prisoners. With the windows always closed and electric light on, people could not tell the difference between day and night. Sleep

deprivation was a common method of torture. It was in Butyrka when the saint first noticed his heart was not working well. This condition got only worse in exile.

Bishop Luke was sent to Siberia, the town of Yeniseisk. The train journey, in the middle of winter, with only bread and water for food, took one month. The house in Yeniseisk, where he was allowed to stay, the saint turned into a church for the faithful and office for his patients. The bishop-doctor gave spiritual advice and continued his medical practice.

The local doctors were very pleased to have such a well-known colleague. One day, they received a dying man whose kidneys had stopped working. There, in a small Siberian hospital, with primitive instruments, the Blessed Surgeon performed a successful operation, the first in the world, of transplanting a kidney from a cow to a human. He also operated on cataracts, saving his patients' vision. Sometimes, the only way to disinfect the instruments was to boil them in a samovar.

The authorities did not allow Bishop Luke to work at one place. They sent him further and further north, where the conditions were unbearable. Vladyka continued to serve the Liturgy, and other priests – often from hundreds of miles away – came to see him and receive his blessing.

Then Bishop Luke was sent to Tashkent, where he again took up his episcopal duties. Unable to get a job at a hospital, he treated his patients at home. More accusations, arrests and exile followed. The saint spent years in Krasnoyarsk, then Arkhangelsk.

In 1934 Bishop Luke was allowed to return to Tashkent. He had a few relatively peaceful years there, spending time with his children, whom he missed so much. As a doctor and scientist, he was allowed to teach students, give lectures and publish articles. But this time brought a devastating health problem: the loss of vision in one eye, which meant the end of his career as a surgeon.

In 1937 a new arrest came. In prison he was humiliated and physically tortured. Once, Bishop Luke was deprived of sleep for 13 days while the authorities interrogated him non-stop. His whole body was covered with wounds from the blows of his tormentors. They wanted him to sign a criminal confession. The saint refused and went on an 18-day-long hunger strike. After the arrest he was sent into exile, again to Krasnoyarsk. When the Great Patriotic War came, Vladyka worked at the military hospital helping to treat wounded soldiers.

In 1942 Bishop Luke was appointed Archbishop of Krasnoyarsk, and, after the local authorities allowed a small church to open, he celebrated there the first Divine Liturgy. In 1946 St. Luke became Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea. He published three more medical articles. After that, his vision became progressively worse until he was completely blind.

The Archbishop continued serving and was able to move around his church without help. His sermons were filled with love and compassion. As a doctor, he gave advice to his colleagues without ever making a diagnostic mistake.

St. Luke fell asleep in the Lord on June 11, 1961. At his funeral, hundreds and hundreds of people gathered in the streets to honour their beloved pastor. They all chanted “Holy God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us” – and the authorities, no matter how they tried, couldn’t make them stop.

St. Luke, the Blessed Surgeon and Archbishop of Simferopol and Crimea, was glorified by the Russian Orthodox Church in 2000.

Blessed Matrona of Moscow

(†1952)

Commemoration Days: February 7, May 2

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. - Psalms 45:1



God in His infinite mercy sends His saints to the world to pour out His blessings. Thus He sent His servant, Blessed Matrona of Moscow, to help the weak and sick in times of great spiritual darkness.

Blessed Matrona was born in 1885 to a poor peasant family in the village of Sebino in the Tula Region. At a young age, God gave her spiritual vision and the gift of healing. Without education and blind from birth, everything was revealed to Matrona. She foretold the great suffering that lie ahead for Russia. She saw into each person’s heart and inner most thoughts in order to help them. Her prayers healed many people with physical and spiritual afflictions.

Matrona lost the use of her legs at age 17. Accepting it as God's will, she never complained of her condition but considered herself the happiest person. A constant stream of visitors from near and far found their way to Matrona's house in the village. Her wise guidance put many on the path of righteousness.

In 1925 Matrona settled in Moscow where she lived for the rest of her life. Eating very little, she spent her nights in prayer and her days attending to the sick and troubled. As many as forty people a day came to her for help.

Matrona had to move constantly from one apartment to another to avoid arrest. She always knew in advance when the police would come. The Soviet authorities were powerless against a blind, disabled woman supported by the power and grace of God.

During World War II, Matrona told of the fate of relatives on the Front. Some people were reassured that their loved ones were alive; others were comforted and advised to prepare for funeral services. All were instructed to follow the teachings in the Scriptures, marry in the Church, and take Confession and Communion.

People from all walks of life came to Matrona: common people, peasants, intelligentsia and military. Matrona never took credit for the healing or help that others received. She always claimed that God was working through her.

Having foretold the day of her death, Blessed Matrona of Moscow reposed on May 2, 1952. The Orthodox Church remembers her on this day.

St. Nicholas of Serbia, Bishop of Zhicha

(†1956)

Commemoration Days: March 15, May 3



Blessed Nicholas, the “Serbian Chrysostom,” was a writer, scholar, diplomat and missionary who inspired the faithful in times of peace and stood by their side in times of great trouble.

Nikolaj was the first child of Serbian peasants, Dragomir and Katarina Velimirovich, who lived in the small village of Lelich. Born on December 23, 1880, the baby was named after the family’s patron saint, Nicholas of Myrna. Later, eight more children followed, all of whom would perish during World War II. Both parents were very pious. All his life Nikolaj considered

his mother the most important influence in his spiritual development.

Nikolaj’s formal education began in a monastery. In addition to reading, writing and mathematics, he studied the Scriptures, teachings of the early Church fathers and Serbian history. As a young man, he demonstrated great zeal for learning and spent hours with a book high up in the bell tower.

Small and weak from childhood, Nikolaj was not strong as an adult. He tried to enter a Military academy but couldn’t pass the physical exam. His scholastic ability allowed him to go first to Belgrade Seminary, then to the Universities of Bern and Oxford, and to Saint Petersburg Theological Academy. Nikolaj had an excellent knowledge of world literature and was fluent in French, Russian, German and English. His doctoral dissertation he wrote in French.

In 1909 Nikolaj was tonsured as a monk under the name Nicholas. He became a professor at Belgrade Theological Academy, where he taught philosophy, logic, history and foreign languages. Fr. Nicholas traveled extensively, and visited Britain and the United States several times – giving lectures, sermons, and working for unity among the Serbs and other Slavic peoples. He served as an ambassador for his Church. At the start of World War I, Fr. Nicholas was sent on a diplomatic mission to England to ask for help in the Serbs’ struggle against Austria. He became the first Orthodox Christian to preach in St. Paul’s Cathedral in London, and made a strong impression on his listeners.

The war devastated his Motherland and left many children without parents. In 1919, when Fr. Nicholas was consecrated as Bishop of Zhicha, he used his new position to establish orphanages, help the poor and reopen monasteries. As a missionary bishop, he traveled to the United States, where he gave more than a hundred lectures and raised a large amount of money for Serbian orphans.

When the Germans occupied Yugoslavia in World War II, Vladyka Nicholas was arrested and sent to the concentration camp in Dachau. He witnessed the most cruel torture and suffering the world has ever known. In the camp St. Nicholas composed a Canon to the Most Holy Mother of God and prayers titled “In the Shadow of the German Bayonets.” After prisoners of the camp were liberated by the 36th American Division of the Allied Forces, holy confessor Nicholas went to England and, later, the United States – where he spent the rest of his life. He couldn’t return to his native Serbia because the country had been taken over by the communists.

In the United States the exiled Bishop taught at various academic institutions. In all, Bishop Nicholas was awarded five doctorates. In 1946 he received his final Doctorate of Theology from Columbia University. To the very end, he continued to be “the voice of the Serbs.”

On March 16th, 1956, Father Nicholas fell asleep in the Lord while in prayer in his cell at St. Tikhon Russian Orthodox Seminary in Pennsylvania.

From the Writings of Vladyka Nicholas

You wrote me about a miracle that happened to you during the war. Before the start of a battle, someone had distributed the Gospel to the soldiers. Small, beautifully decorated books. You also took one. And you commented bitterly, “Here we need steel and lead, not books. If steel doesn’t save us, then books even less so!” That was the remark you made then, for until that day you didn’t think that faith in God counts for anything. You looked upon it as if it were some old rags, which mankind has been uselessly dragging along from time immemorial.

But still, you took the little book and put it in your left inner pocket. And what happened? You are telling me: “That was God’s miracle,” and I concur. Around you wounded soldiers were falling and next, you were hit. A steel seed of death found you. You clutched your heart expecting blood to pour out. Later, when you removed your clothes, you

discovered the bullet, aimed directly at your heart, stuck in the firm binding of the book. You started trembling, as if in a fever. The finger of God! The Holy Book saved your life from death-bearing lead. That day you consider to be the day of your spiritual birth. And since then, you've been in awe of God, thoroughly exploring His teaching. So, you see, faith in Christ is not a decrepit cloth, and mankind bears it not in vain.

(Letter to John N.)

Blessed Nina, New Martyr

(†1938)

Commemoration Days: February 7, May 14

Blessed Nina was the only child of Alexei Kuznetzov, a police sergeant, and his wife, Anna. She was born in 1887 in the village of Lalsk, Arkhangelsk region, three decades before the Revolution that would change the country to the very core. Most Russian people at that time were still God-fearing, sincere Christians. The small village where the Kuznetzovs lived had six churches. Alexei and Anna baptized their baby in honour of St. Nina, Equal to the Apostles, who brought the light of Christianity to a pagan land. Years later, their daughter would give her life to keep this light alive – in a land that was receding into darkness.



Unable to have more children, Nina's parents cherished their daughter and gave her much love and attention. They wanted her someday to marry and have a family. But, as Nina was growing up, it became clear she had a different mission in life. More than anything else, the girl liked reading the Scriptures, learning prayers and attending church. Nina had an exceptional memory and, at a young age, learned the entire Psalter by heart. Respecting his daughter's inclinations, Alexei purchased spiritual literature for her. He cleared his shed and built shelves for Nina's many books, so she could have her own prayer house and library.

In the 1920s, after the new government closed a monastery in the Arkhangelsk region, Nina's parents offered shelter to the abbot and several monks. All homeless and displaced people were welcome in the Kuznetzovs' large house. Nina gave her bed to the guests and slept on a stool, getting up each night at two o'clock for prayer. Thanks to multiple petitions

to the authorities, and a delegation to Moscow she had organized, one church in their village remained open longer than all others in the area.

In 1932 Nina's elderly parents were arrested and imprisoned. They couldn't endure the harsh treatment and both soon died. Nina, devastated by the loss, suffered a stroke, which left her partially paralyzed. She lost the use of her right arm. Moving with much difficulty, she crossed herself with the help of her left arm. The local government allowed Nina to keep the house, and she continued to give refuge to anybody who needed a place to stay. Guests and neighbours brought food, which the blessed one never ate but kept for others. She herself lived on bread and water for years.

The Cathedral of the Resurrection, the only remaining place of worship in Lalsk, still functioned, but the number of parishioners declined. Out of fear of persecution, people were afraid to attend. Blessed Nina never missed a service. If the priest or deacon forgot which part of the Gospel to read, she always directed him to the correct passage. Since her childhood, she knew all the words of the divine service by heart.

In 1937 the NKVD arrested the priest, deacon, church elder, acolytes, and choir members. After a quick trial, they all were sent to labour camps, where many perished. But the authorities couldn't find anyone to testify against Nina. People in the village loved her and felt sorry for her disability. Many days after Nina's imprisonment, one person agreed to say that the blessed one worked to undermine Soviet power. The weak, infirm woman was sentenced to hard labour. In May of 1938, Blessed Nina died in a concentration camp.

Venerable Silouan of Athos, Monk and Ascetic

(†1938)

Commemoration Day: September 24

St. Silouan was born Simeon Antonov to a large peasant family in the village of Sovsk, Tambov region, in 1866. Simeon's parents were illiterate and poor but very kindhearted and hospitable. They never denied a visiting stranger or needy neighbour food and shelter. Simeon and his siblings grew up in a loving home and learned lessons of charity and trust in God.

As a boy, Simeon was once walking with his father along the fields and saw a man stealing their wheat. Simeon told his father about it. "Don't worry, son," was his father's reply. "Let him. The man is hungry and we have plenty. The good Lord will provide." All his life, Simeon held his father in high regard.

Simeon's older brothers hired themselves out to do construction work, and Simeon started helping them when he became strong enough. He grew into a tall, very robust and handsome young man. Soon, the temptations of the world overcame him: he began drinking and partying with friends. A man once challenged him to a fight, and Simeon struck him in the chest so hard that he fell and couldn't get up for a long time.

With the grace of God, Simeon soon recognized that the path he had taken was destroying his soul. One night, he dreamed of being swallowed up by an awful serpent. He woke up in horror and started praying. All his life as a monk, Venerable Silouan would ask God for forgiveness of the sins of his youth.

After serving in the military, at age twenty-seven, Simeon left his native land and came to Mount Athos. He became a monk at the Russian Monastery of St. Panteleimon and received the name Silouan, in honour of St. Silvanus, an ancient martyr.

Fr. Silouan's first obedience was to work in the mill. Gradually he was given more responsibility, and became one of the stewards of the monastery, supervising 1,000 monks and 200 laymen who worked there. At the end of the day, he returned to his cell to pray. Fasting severely and sleeping only a couple of hours each night, he practiced the ceaseless



Jesus prayer. He wept not just for his own sins, but also for the world's. Compassionate towards man's failings and wrongdoings, Fr. Silouan placed the highest importance on the forgiveness of enemies.

St. Silouan never sought a hermit's life. After many years of spiritual trial, while living among people, he achieved great humility and inner stillness, keeping his mind free from worldly thoughts and passions. Many pilgrims visiting the monastery asked him for his wise guidance.

Fr. Silouan lived in the monastery forty-six years. Shortly before the ascetic's death, someone asked him if he was ready to meet his Maker. He answered, "I haven't conquered my pride yet." After a brief illness in September of 1938, the saint fell asleep in the Lord.

A man of great wisdom, St. Silouan could barely read and write. He left many notes that needed to be transcribed and edited. Another monk of Mount Athos, Fr. Sophrony, took this job upon himself. The collection of St. Silouan's writings was first published in Paris in 1952.

From the Writings of Fr. Silouan

Those who dislike and reject their fellow man are impoverished in their being. They do not know the true God, Who is all-embracing love.

Understand two thoughts, and fear them. One is, "I am a saint," and the other, "I won't be saved." Both thoughts are from the enemy, and there is no truth in them. But think: I am a great sinner, but the Lord is merciful. He loves people, and He will forgive my sins.

A monk is a man who prays for the entire world... I tell you that when we have no more men of prayer, the world will come to an end and great adversity will arise – as, indeed, is happening already.

St. Zachariah, Archbishop of Voronezh and Zadonsk, Hieromartyr

(†1937)

Commemoration Days: February 7, September 22



In 1888, a recent Seminary graduate, Fr. Zachariah, was appointed to serve in a rural church in the Voronezh region. The life of a village priest was expected to be simple and quiet. Nothing at the time foretold the adversity that lay ahead of those who had chosen the path of serving God. A gentle and humble man, Fr. Zachariah would be called upon to confess his faith, show remarkable strength of character, and endure great sorrow, betrayal and physical suffering.

Zakhar was born in the family of Peter Lobov, an office clerk, and his wife, Alexandra, in the settlement of Petrovka, Voronezh region. Although his parents possessed very modest means, they supported their son's desire for education. Zakhar made up his mind to become a priest when he was still a boy, and never questioned the decision. He went to study in a clerical school and then at Tambov Seminary.

For his zeal in pastoral care, Fr. Zachariah quickly earned the love of the congregation. In addition to his clerical duties, Fr. Zachariah was an educator. He taught children the tenets of the faith and served as director of the School of Literacy for adults. In 1900 Fr. Zachariah was transferred to the Holy Trinity Cathedral in Novocherkassk. Several years later, he became an archpriest, while continuing to teach in local schools and colleges.

1917, the year of the Revolution, brought personal grief to Fr. Zachariah. His beloved wife, Alexandra, mother of their seven children, died. Of the five sons, four tread in their father's footsteps entering the Seminary. Alexei, later tonsured, would die a martyr's death in a labour camp in 1942.

The movement of Renovationism, supported by the new government, started spreading among the clergy. Fr. Zachariah opposed the changes in the Church from the very beginning. The Soviet secret police kept an eye on the archpriest's activities and collected a dossier on him. The documents stated that, "priest Lobov alone in the Don Diocese remains a follower of Patriarch Tikhon."

Upon his tonsure in 1923, Fr. Zachariah was ordained a Bishop. Thanks to Vladyka's great effort, and to the joy of believers, most of the parishes in the area returned to the Patriarchal Church. People held Vladyka in high regard, and when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy, the church was full. The saint's home became a refuge for members of the clergy returning from exile with no place to live. He corresponded with many priests and bishops asking them to be strong in defense of the Holy Faith.

Vladyka Zachariah was arrested and sent first to a Rostov jail, then, as "one of the worst enemies of Soviet power," – to infamous Butyrka prison in Moscow. To the accusations of spreading "counter-revolutionary propaganda among the masses by means of preaching," he responded, "I tell people that God exists. It is the truth, not propaganda." After spending a few years in Solovki, a prison camp in the archipelago in the White Sea, Vladyka Zachariah was released. He went back to serving and soon was appointed Archbishop of Voronezh and Zadonsk Diocese.

In his new position, Vladyka experienced many sorrows: churches were closed and destroyed daily, priests arrested, and the faithful persecuted. With great difficulty, the Archbishop was able to keep several churches open. That time also brought betrayal by those whom Vladyka considered friends. A priest and deacon of one of the area churches wrote a false report on him, accusing Vladyka of "hostility and conspiracies towards the Soviet government." A simple and kindhearted man, St. Zachariah was so loved by the faithful, that when accusations came, many people testified in his defense, well understanding the danger. But the court didn't take their testimony into consideration.

In 1937, after years at a labour camp in Kazakhstan, the seventy-two-year-old man – blind, half-starved and very sick – was sentenced to death for celebrating a Paschal service. St. Zachariah was buried in an unmarked common grave.

Hieromartyrs Peter Karelin and Hermogenes Dolganyov

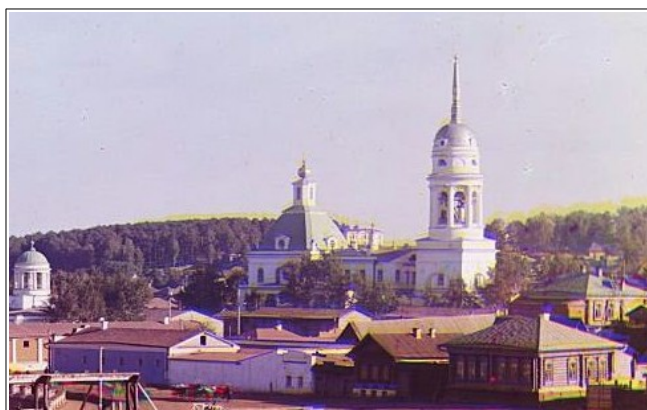
With the Revolution of 1917 a wave of terror, unprecedented in scale and brutality, fell heavily on the Church. The country that for centuries had upheld holy Christian traditions became a land of bloody persecution. The new government quickly extended its control to all corners of Russia, turning many remote locations into places of martyrdom. In June of 1918, the Tura River in the Tobolsk region became one such place – when two servants of God met their final hour. One was a prominent bishop, active in the Holy Synod and close to the imperial family; the other, a humble priest from a settlement in the Ural mountains. By divine providence, they were united in suffering and death. Standing firm for their faith, both died on the same day by the same ruthless hands.

Fr. Peter Karelin

(†1918)

Commemoration Days: February 7, June 29

Fr. Peter was born to the family of Ivan Karelin, a village priest in Shadrinsk county, Perm region. Following his father's example, Peter chose to serve God and went to study in a Seminary. The diligent and hard-working young man soon became one of the top students and, upon graduating, was ordained a deacon.



Holy Trinity Cathedral, Kamensky Zavod, 1909

In addition to clerical duties, Fr. Peter taught the tenets of the faith to school children and served as warden of the Dalmatov clerical school. For his significant contribution to the field of teaching, Fr. Deacon received praise and recognition from the trustees of the regional Board of Education.

A few years later, after his ordination into the priesthood, Fr. Peter was transferred to the Church of the Epiphany in the village of Kochnevsk. It was a large church that served local residents and the faithful in surrounding villages. The number of parishioners reached well above 2,500. The only priest for the area and a father of four young children, Peter Karelin not only kept up with his pastoral responsibilities but also taught in the county

schools and oversaw the work there. Several times he was elected a representative to district eparchial conventions. For his “excellent and studious service”, as a mark of great honour, priest Peter was awarded a purple skufia.

In 1904 Fr. Peter was transferred once again, this time to the Holy Trinity Cathedral in a settlement called Kamensky Zavod. The residents there were mostly workers of the metallurgical plant, one of the oldest in the Urals, which produced cast iron. Several years went by peacefully for Fr. Peter and his family, but the time of great unrest was approaching. Revolutionary propaganda spread quickly among the workers, and in 1917 repression of the clergy began in full force. However, the services in the Holy Trinity Cathedral continued as usual.

Fr. Peter’s arrest came in June of 1918. In the middle of the Liturgy, a group of Soviet officials entered the Cathedral, demanding the church’s records of births, marriages and deaths. The metric books, they announced, were now property of the Soviet government, and had to be confiscated. The priest refused, and the congregation tried to resist – all in vain. After the books were taken, someone rang the church bells. The alarm drew a large crowd of locals, who became very upset about the action of the new government. Armed soldiers soon arrived and started shooting at the defenseless people. Fr. Peter was arrested and sent to a Yekaterinburg jail. There he met Bishop Hermogenes and several priests, who had been kept in the most inhumane conditions. The Bolsheviks allowed their captives to serve a moleben on Monday of the Holy Spirit. The next day, Fr. Peter and Bishop Hermogenes, with eight other prisoners, were taken to the train station to be transported to Tyumen. In the hands of an execution squad, all understood that the end of their lives was very near.

St. Hermogenes, Bishop of Tobolsk and Siberia

(†1918)

Commemoration Days: February 7, June 29, September 2



Bishop Hermogenes, George Dolganyov in the world, was born in 1858 near Odessa. He was the son of an Old-Believer priest who later became a monk. As a young man, George was not sure what direction in life to take and, after entering Novorossiysk University, tried out different disciplines: law, math, philosophy, and history. He also traveled, farmed the land and, for a short time, studied medicine at the University of Geneva. Nothing seemed to give his soul the contentment he was searching for. George’s spiritual mentor advised him to first finish his studies at the University and then go to a Seminary.

Learning came with difficulty to George, but not for lack of academic ability. He focused not on the subjects, but on spiritual self-improvement. A second-year student at Saint Petersburg Theological Academy, George Dolganyov was tonsured a monk and given the name Hermogenes.

Upon graduation in 1893, Fr. Hermogenes was appointed first an inspector and then Rector of Tiflis Seminary, with the title of Archimandrite. He served with great zeal, founding church schools and ministering to the population. During his administration, the Seminary introduced music courses and built a special hostel for students who were in weak health. As Rector, Fr. Hermogenes had the reputation for being “strict but fair.” He expelled one seminarian, Joseph Dzhugashvili (the future Stalin), for poor grades and reading Marxist literature. Fr. Hermogenes loved Georgia, learned Georgian language, and traveled the country extensively.

In 1901 Fr. Hermogenes was consecrated Bishop of Volsk in the Saratov Diocese. Two years later, he was appointed Bishop of Saratov and invited to attend the Holy Synod. Vladyka paid particular attention to the construction of new churches, chapels, prayer houses, and schools for children. In 1903 the Russian Church canonized Seraphim of Sarov, and, with Vladyka’s blessing, the first cathedral named after the saint soon opened in Saratov. The bishop oversaw the publication of religious literature and led many readings

and discussions on the subject of faith. The spread of revolutionary ideas in Saratov greatly alarmed him, and Vladyka preached unity and peace among the Orthodox. A man of unshakable conviction, Bishop Hermogenes didn't always agree with the Holy Synod's decisions. He was not afraid to voice his opinion if he thought that changes, introduced by the Synod, could adversely affect the Church.

In the year of the Bolshevik Revolution, Vladyka became Bishop of Tobolsk and Siberia. He continued his pastoral service, despite the hostility of the new regime. On Palm Sunday, 1918, Bishop Hermogenes celebrated his last Liturgy. During the procession of the Holy Cross, which attracted an enormous crowd, Vladyka stopped in front of the house where the exiled royal family lived in captivity. With a wooden cross high above his head, the bishop blessed the Tzar, Empress, and their children, all of whom were watching from a window.

The same day, Vladyka was arrested for "counter-revolutionary activities" and taken to Yekaterinburg. He spent weeks in awful prison conditions, praying and singing hymns. The local Soviet authorities demanded a ransom of 10,000 rubles, promising to release the bishop. With a merchant's help, the sum was collected, but the three men who brought the money were shot. One of them was Vladyka's brother, Protopriest Ephraim.

After serving a moleben on Monday of the Holy Spirit, Vladyka Hermogenes, together with Priest Peter Karelin and eight layman prisoners, was taken to the train station to be transferred to Tyumen. The holy man had only few more days to live.

Martyrdom and Veneration

On the night of June 26, after the train arrived in Tyumen, the captives were transported to a steamboat docked on the Tura River. With the White Army quickly advancing, the Bolsheviks became frantic and more brutal. When the steamer stopped at the village of Pokrovskoye, the guards ordered everybody to disembark. Then they shot the eight layman prisoners and ordered Fr. Peter and Bishop Hermogenes to build fortifications. Both men, weakened and exhausted, were forced to carry boards and heavy loads of earth.

The next evening, the martyrs were transferred to another steamer headed for Tobolsk. Father Peter and Bishop Hermogenes were placed in the dark and dirty cargo hold. At about midnight, the guards took Fr. Peter out onto the deck, tore off his clothes, and bound his

hands behind his back. They tied two heavy stones to the holy man and threw him into the water. Vladyka was next to die. When the bishop was brought on deck, he prayed for his tormentors and blessed them. Using mocking and obscene language, the guards bound his hands. As the bishop continued to pray, the commissar ordered that his jaw be held. A heavy blow followed, which broke Vladyka's front teeth and silenced him. After tying an eighty-pound rock to his hands, the guards threw the bishop into the river.

Two weeks later, the body of Hieromartyr Hermogenes was discovered by local peasants and buried on the shore. Tobolsk by that time had been liberated by the White Army. Later, the remains were disinterred and taken to the Sophia Cathedral. Hundreds of people came to the funeral services, and the holy relics were laid to rest in a crypt in one of the chapels. The body of Peter Karelin was never found.

In 2000 the Russian Church glorified Bishop Hermogenes and Fr. Peter as confessors and martyrs for the faith. In 2005, during repairs of the Cathedral, restoration workers discovered the crypt of St. Hermogenes. With great care and reverence, in the presence of many Orthodox dignitaries, the relics were moved to the Holy Protection Church, where they remain today.

Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. - Matthew 5:11-12