

FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT



THE BLESSING OF NEW ICONS

HOLY TRINITY ORTHODOX CHURCH

WILLIMANTIC, CONNECTICUT

OCTOBER FOURTEENTH
TWO THOUSAND EIGHTEEN

Saint Ignatius of Antioch **(35 - 107)**

Bishop of Antioch who died in Rome in 110. Ignatius (“*God-bearer*”) is known mainly from seven highly regarded letters that he wrote during a trip to Rome, as a prisoner condemned to be executed for his beliefs. He was apparently eager to counteract the teachings of two groups—the Judaizers, who did not accept the authority of the New Testament, and the Docetists, who held that Christ’s sufferings and death were apparent, but not real. The letters have often been cited as a source of knowledge of the Christian church at the beginning of the 2nd century.

Record Of His Life

Although St. Ignatius was an influential church leader and theologian, he is best known from his writings. There is no record of his life prior to his arrest, but his letters reveal his personality and his impact on the Christianity of his time. Ignatius represented the Christian religion in transition from its Jewish origins to its assimilation in the Greco-Roman world. He laid the foundation for dogmas that would be formulated in succeeding generations. His advocacy of a hierarchical structure of the church with emphasis on episcopal authority, his insistence on the real humanity of Christ, and his ardent desire for martyrdom, are subjects that have generated much discussion.

The Letters: Warnings Against False Teachings

The letters of Ignatius abound in warnings against false doctrines and in admonitions to preserve peace and concord by willing subordination in all religious matters to the clergy and, above all, to the bishop.

The Good Shepherd

The honor of apostle, bishop, and martyr was well merited by Ignatius, this energetic soldier of the Faith. An enthusiastic devotion to duty, a passionate love of sacrifice, and an utter fearlessness in the defense of Christian truth, were his chief characteristics. In every sense of the word he was a true pastor, pastor of souls, and the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep

Saint Justin Martyr

(100 – 165)

Saint Justin Martyr is one of the most important of the Greek philosopher and apologists in the early church. Reared in a Jewish environment, Justin studied Stoic, Platonic, and other pagan philosophies prior to becoming a Christian in 132. Soon after, he began traveling proclaiming his newfound Christian philosophy, mostly in Rome. Years later, Justin was condemned to death by the Romans. Authentic records of his martyrdom, in Rome, survive.

Notable Works

Justin's major works include two *Apologies* and the *Dialogue with Trypho*. The first, or "Major Apology," was addressed approximately 150 to the Roman emperors, including Marcus Aurelius. In the first part, Justin defends his fellow Christians against the charges of atheism and hostility to the Roman state. He then goes on to express the core of his Christian philosophy: the highest aspiration of both Christianity and Platonic philosophy is a transcendent and unchangeable God; consequently, an intellectual articulation of the Christian faith would demonstrate its harmony with reason.

First Documents on Holy Eucharist Recorded

In his *First Apology*, Justin vividly describes the early Christians' method of celebrating the Eucharist. It is universally considered the first Christian documents on the Holy Eucharist were written by Justin Martyr, and it exists in a similar format even today. The church's First Eucharistic Rite (1st c.), was described by Saint Justin Martyr, and it consisted of:

- Read Scripture
- Sermon
- Intercessory Prayer
- Kiss of Peace
- Holy Eucharist

After the worship, fellowship, as it is today two centuries later, was considered vital to continuing to add to the community of believers.

Saint Irenaeus of Lyons (120 – 203)

Saint Irenaeus, born in Smyrna, now Turkey, was a Christian theologian of the 2nd century. His work, *Against Heresies*, written in 180, was a refutation of Gnosticism, a prominent heretical movement of the 2nd century which taught that the world was created and ruled by a lesser divinity. Overall, Irenaeus' writings advanced the development of an authoritative canon of Scriptures, the Creed, and the authority of the episcopal office. He is regarded as the earliest surviving witness to recognize all four gospel accounts as being essential.

Life in the Early Church

Irenaeus' works established that he heard and saw Polycarp of Smyrna, the last known living connection with our Lord's Apostles. According to the well-known 4th century church historian, Eusebius, Irenaeus, prior to his becoming bishop, had served as a missionary to southern Gaul and as a peacemaker among the churches of Asia Minor. The era in which Irenaeus lived was a time of expansion and inner tensions in the church. In many cases, Irenaeus was a mediator between contending factions. He noted that differences in external factors, such as dates of festivals, need not be so serious as to destroy church unity.

Irenaeus' Writings: Development of Apostolic Succession

All his known writings are devoted to the conflict with the Gnostics. His principal work consists of five books in a work entitled *Adversus Haereses* (Against Heresies). Irenaeus asserted in a positive manner the validity of the Jewish Bible (Old Testament), which the Gnostics denied, claiming that it upheld the laws of the Creator. Though Irenaeus did not actually refer to two testaments, one old and one new, he prepared the way for this terminology. He asserted the validity of the two testaments at a time when concern for the unity and the difference between the two parts of the Bible was developing, and in doing so, established a canon of Scriptures. Irenaeus felt that the bishops provided the only safe guide to the interpretation of Scripture. With these lists of bishops the later doctrine of "the apostolic succession" of the bishops could be linked. Irenaeus exercised wide influence on the generation which followed.

Saint Athanasius the Great (298 - 373)

St. Athanasius of Alexandria was a theologian, ecclesiastical statesman, and Egyptian national leader. He was the chief defender of Christian orthodoxy in the 4th-century battle against Arianism. His episcopate lasted 45 years (c. 8 June 328 – 2 May 373), of which over 17 were spent in five exiles ordered by four different Roman emperors. Athanasius was a Christian theologian, a Church Father, the chief defender of Trinitarianism against Arianism, and a noted Egyptian leader of the fourth century. His important works include *The Life of St. Antony*, *On the Incarnation*, and *Four Orations Against the Arians*.

Life & Major Contributions

Athanasius, at age 27, attended the First Ecumenical Council in Nicea (325) in the role as a deacon. He was to become a bishop just five years later, at age 32. The first years of his episcopate were devoted to visitation of his extensive patriarchate, which included all of Egypt and Libya. During this time he established important contacts with the Coptic monks and their leader Saint Pachomius. Soon after began the struggle that occupied much of his episcopacy, if not his entire life. During his periods of exile, Athanasius, however, kept in touch with his flock through the annual *Festal Letters*. In 346, however, he was welcomed to return to his native Egypt, and this time accorded the respect he had deserved.

Athanasius's "golden decade" of peace and prosperity followed, during which he assembled documents relating to his exiles and returns in the *Apology Against the Arians*. Nevertheless, political charges were brought against Athanasius, his banishment was repeated, and in 356 an attempt was made to arrest him during a vigil service. This time he withdrew to Upper Egypt, where he was protected in monasteries. The death of emperor Constantius (361), allowed Athanasius to return once more to his see. Among Athanasius's important works are *The Letters to Sarapion* (Divinity of the Holy Spirit), and *The Life of St. Antony*, did much to spread the asceticism in East and West. Athanasius has an important place among the teachers and leaders of the church, and, as an Egyptian patriot, he is also a significant figure in the history of his country.

Saint Nina (Nino) of Georgia *“Equal-to-the-Apostles”* **(280 – 332)**

Nina was a relative of Great Martyr George and the only daughter of respected and honorable parents. When Nino reached age 12, her parents sold all their possessions and moved to Jerusalem. Soon after, Nino’s father was tonsured a monk. He bid farewell to his family and went to labor in the Jordan wilderness. Nina’s mother, Sosana, was ordained a deaconess, leaving Nina in care of Sara Niaphor. It was from Sara that Nino learned how Christ’s Robe had arrived in Georgia. Georgia was declared one of Christianity’s earliest countries in 337, five years after Nina’s repose. Armenia is considered the oldest Christian state.

Off to Iberia

Soon Nina began to pray to the Theotokos that she go to Georgia (ancient Iberia) and be made worthy to venerate the Sacred Robe of our Lord. The Holy Virgin heard her prayers and appeared to Nina, saying, “Go to the country that was assigned to me by lot and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He will send down His grace upon you and I will be your protector.” The Theotokos presented Nina with a cross of grapevines and proclaimed, “Receive this cross as a shield against all enemies.” When she awoke, Nino was holding a grapevine cross. Iconography depicts Nina holding a grapevine cross, the symbol of Georgian Christianity, along with her holding a scroll upon which is written the teachings of our Lord.

Contribution to Georgian Orthodoxy

Nina related the vision to her uncle, Patriarch Juvenal, and revealed her desire to preach the Gospel in Georgia. Juvenal prayed, “O Lord, God of Eternity, I beseech Thee on behalf of my orphaned niece: Grant that, according to Thy will, she may go to preach and proclaim Thy Holy Resurrection. O Christ God, be to her a guide, a refuge, and a spiritual father. And as Thou enlightened the Apostles, do Thou also enlighten her with the wisdom to proclaim Thy glad tidings.” As result of her unceasing labors, Nina, Equal-to-the-Apostles, Georgia was established as a nation solidly rooted in the Christian Faith.

Saint Mary Magdalene *“Apostle-to-the-Apostles”* (1st c.)

St. Mary Magdalene, **also called** Mary of Magdala, one of Jesus’ most celebrated disciples, famous, according to Mark 16:9–10 and John 20:14–17, for being the first person to see the resurrected Christ. The unchallenged facts about her life establish that Jesus cleansed her of seven demons (Luke 8:2 and Mark 16:9), probably implying that he cured her of a physical disorder rather than the popular notion that he freed her of evil spirits. She was one of the women who accompanied and aided Jesus in Galilee (Luke 8:1–2), and all four canonical Gospels attest that she witnessed Jesus’ crucifixion and burial; John 19:25–26 further notes that she stood by the cross, near the Virgin Mary and the unidentified Apostle whom Jesus loved.

Anointing our Lord

Having seen where Jesus was buried (Mark 15:47), she went with two other women on Easter morning to the tomb to anoint Christ. Finding the tomb empty, Mary ran to the disciples. She returned with Saint Petetr, who, astonished, left her. Christ then appeared to Mary and, according to John 20:17, instructed her to tell the Apostles that he was risen.

Appearances of Mary

The details are uncertain, since the sources disagree on who saw him and where he was seen (the final sections of Matthew, Luke, and John; the beginning of Acts; and the list in Paul’s first Letter to the Corinthians, 15:5–8). According to Matthew, an angel showed the empty tomb to Mary Magdalene and “the other Mary” and instructed them to tell the disciples to go to Galilee. While still in Jerusalem, the two Marys saw Jesus, who told them the same thing, and he appeared once more, to the disciples in Galilee. Matthew’s account is implied in Mark 14:28 and 16:7, though the Gospel of Mark does not have a resurrection story, ending instead with the empty tomb (Mark 16:8). According to Luke, however, while the disciples remained in Jerusalem, the women (Mary Magdalene; Joanna; Mary, the mother of James; and “the other women”).

Saint Helen(a) of Constantinople “Equal-to-the-Apostles” (250-330)

Saint Helen, also called Helena, was an Empress of the Roman Empire. She ranks as an important figure in the history of Christianity due to her influence on her son, Emperor Constantine the Great, who reigned from 306-337. Little is known of Helen’s early life, yet scholars have not been kind to her. Fourth century sources record that she came from a ‘low background ... the lowest of the commoners’. Saint Ambrose was the first to call her a *stabularia*, a term translated as ‘stable-maid’ or ‘innkeeper.’

Helen’s Pilgrimage to Holy Land

Helena was married to the Roman emperor Constantius I Chlorus, who renounced her for political reasons. When her son, Constantine I the Great, became emperor at York in 306, he made her Empress, and under his influence she later became a Christian. Immediately after a double family tragedy in 326, in which Saint Helen’s grandson along with another family member were executed, Helena made a pilgrimage to the Holy Land, during which she reported discovered the True Cross of Jesus Christ. She caused churches to be built on the reputed sites of Christ’s Nativity (in Bethlehem) and Ascension (near Jerusalem).

The Cross of Jesus Christ

Prior to 327 it was claimed tht Christ’s cross had been found during the building of Constantine’s church on Golgotha, under a demolished temple dedicated to Venus. According to tradition, Helen ordered the temple torn down, and at the end of the 4th century, chose a site to begin excavating which led to the discovery of the Cross of Christ, along with the crosses of the two thieves. Helen refused to be swayed by anything but solid proof that this was the Cross of Christ; so she performed a test. Helen had a woman who was near death brought from the city. When the woman touched the first and second crosses, her condition did not change; however, when she touched the third and final cross she suddenly recovered and Helen declared the cross with which the woman had been touched to the True Cross. On the site of the discovery, Constantine ordered the building of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Saint Catherine of Alexandria (287-305)

According to tradition, Saint Catherine “Of the Wheel” and ‘Great Martyr’ who martyred in the early 4th century by the pagan emperor, Maxentius. Although there are no surviving primary sources attesting to Catherine’s existence, the fact that her memory, and the stories about her, have been kept alive, certainly confirm her existence. Catherine was a noted scholar and devoted to her studies, who became a Christian at age 14, converted hundreds of people to Christianity and was martyred at age 18. When the persecutions began under Maxentius, Catherine rebuked the emperor’s cruel ways. The emperor summoned 50 of the best pagan philosophers and orators to dispute with her, hoping that they would disagree with her pro-Christian arguments, but Catherine, who is considered the patroness of female students, emerged victorious in these debates, her intelligence and eloquence so convincing. Due to Catherine’s influence several of her opponents declared themselves Christian and were at once put to death.

Catherine’s Arrest; Saint Catherine’s Monastery

Catherine was arrested and scourged, yet despite these torture, did not abandon her faith. Word of her arrest and the power of her faith quickly spread and over 200 people visited her. According to some researchers, the emperor's own wife, Valeria Maximilla, was converted by Catherine. The emperor eventually executed his own wife over her conversion. Following her imprisonment, Maxentius made a final attempt to persuade the beautiful Catherine to abandon her faith by proposing marriage to her; she refused. The emperor angrily ordered her to be executed on a breaking wheel. The breaking wheel is an ancient form of torture where a person's limbs are threaded among the spokes and their bones are shattered by an executioner with a heavy rod. It is a brutal punishment that results in a slow and painful death, normally reserved for the worst criminals. When Catherine was presented before the wheel, she touched it and a miracle occurred that caused the wheel to shatter. Unable to torture her to death, the emperor simply ordered her beheaded. In the sixth century, the Emperor Justinian ordered a monastery established in her name. The monastery on Mount Sinai, named Saint Catherine's, remains to this day and is one of the oldest in the world.

Saint Thekla of Antioch *“Equal-to-the-Apostles”* (16 -106)

Saint Thekla was born in Iconium to wealthy parents. Years later, after having heard the Apostle Paul speak on chastity, she decided to follow Christ and abandon her plans to marry. Her mother and fiancé were opposed to this decision, and their accusations to the governor landed Paul in prison. Thekla slipped away from her house to listen to Paul in prison, having bribed the guards with gold jewelry.

Thekla Escapes Torture

At his trial, Saint Paul was banished from the city, but Thekla refused to change her mind against all the threats her mother and the governor applied. She was firm in her conviction to follow Christ. Her mother, enraged, persuaded the judge to sentence Thekla to burn to death. Emboldened by her love for Christ, she made the sign of the Cross over the flames, and was untouched by the flames. Rain extinguished the fire, and, with thunder, helped to drive away those who wished to put Thekla to death. She sought out Paul and his companions, including Saint Barnabas, who were hiding in a cave near Antioch. She asked that she might be permitted to spend the remainder of her life as an ascetic, and is reported to have lived in a cave for 72 years.

Patron Saint of Ascetics & Women Monastics

Saint Thekla continued her life of asceticism and then peacefully fell asleep in Christ at the age of 90. Shortly after her death a community of virgins went to live in her mountain cell, building a small chapel to enshrine her body. This Convent of Saint Thekla still exists today near the village of Ma'loula, Syria. Because of her many sufferings for the Faith the Church counts her as a “Protomartyr”. And because she converted so many people to Christianity she is also known as an “Equal-to-the-Apostles”, a title she was given because she accompanied Saint Paul in founding churches, and many were converted to Christ because of her ministry. Thekla is considered the first women martyr for the Christian faith, and is widely considered an ascetic role model for women. She is highly venerated in the Eastern Church, as well as by the West.

Saint Barbara of Damascus (273-306)

Saint Barbara was from Heliopolis, Syria, and was the daughter of Dioscorus, an idolater, who according to hagiographers kept her locked in a tower. In her early teens, Barbara was enlightened with a pure heart and believed in the Holy Trinity. At this time Dioscorus began building a bath-house, but before it was completed he traveled to attend to other personal matters. In his absence, Barbara directed the workmen to build a third window in addition to the two her father had commanded. She also inscribed the sign of the Cross upon the marble of the bath-house, leaving the Cross as deeply into the marble as if it had been done with an iron tool. When Dioscorus returned, and asked about the third window, Barbara began to state the mystery of the Trinity. Because she refused to renounce her faith, Dioscorus tortured Barbara, and after subjecting her to many sufferings, he beheaded his daughter, with his own hands. Barbara is often portrayed being wrapped in chains and holding a tower.

One of the Church's Most Beloved Saints

This sweet girl could have saved herself and appeased her wrathful father with a disavowal of Christ, but she chose to die rather than deny the Savior. A virgin martyr of early Christianity, Barbara's brutal end, at age 33, as well as her pure life, resulted in the subsequent outpouring of tributes which generations passed on to generations in ever-expanding glorification until she became one of the most popular of all saints in the Middle Ages. Countless Christians down through the centuries have found inspiration in hearing her story.

A Patron to Many

A saint in the highest tradition of purity and piety, Barbara is listed in some church branches as one of the fourteen auxiliary saints who are sometimes referred to as holy "Helpers," but she held out so much hope for so many of the faithful that she was adopted by various segments of society as their artillerymen and firemen and just about everyone engaged in hazardous occupations, including military engineers and miners. She is regarded by some as the safeguard against sudden death.

TSVETA 'CVETA' MARINOVA

+

OUR ICONOGRAPHER



Since earning Bachelor's and Master's Degrees from the National Academy of Fine Arts in Sofia, Bulgaria, (1968-1974), Cveta has worked as an iconographer, scenic designer, and artist since 1974. She has been the Production Designer & Art Director for twelve Bulgarian feature films, and Costume & Set Designer of more than seventy theater productions in Sofia and other Bulgarian cities for plays written by William Shakespeare, Friedrich Schiller, Tennessee Williams, Eugene O'Neil, and Anton Chekhov, among others. Cveta participates annually in iconography, painting and textile exhibits, she has had ten solo exhibits in art galleries in Sofia and Blagoevgrad. Cveta has one child, Maria, who like her father, +George Goutsev, is a master iconographer. Since 1991, Cveta has been married to Asen Shopov, a very prominent Bulgarian theater director.

A Reflection on Icons

Celebrated on the First Sunday of Lent, the Triumph of Orthodoxy has both historical and personal significance. The Triumph of Orthodoxy does not stand as a victory over others; it stands, instead, front and center, as the Triumph of Truth.

The Seventh Ecumenical Council reestablished the veneration of icons, and in turn rejected the compromise proposal that icons be placed on the same level of sacred vessels. The Church Fathers argued that icons belonged on the same level as The Word of God, as proclaimed in the Gospel, and Divine Services. Together, they are the backbone of Holy Tradition and serve as communion with God the creator.

Whereas the Word of God is emphatic and powerful, and Divine Services are sung angelically, the icon conveys the Tradition of Silence. It speaks with an identical amount of force and doctrine as the Word and Divine Offices do. The Triumph of Orthodoxy declares the truth of the Incarnation, that God who is invisible, ineffable, incomprehensible, and eternally the same, took on human flesh and lived among his disciples and followers in simplicity and humility.

Orthodox iconography, written in the Byzantine and Russian styles, has captured the imagination of Christians of all faiths since the time the Evangelist Luke is reported to have written the first icon. Whereas in our Western culture, we are encouraged to be attentive to the process and are assured the results will follow, the opposite holds in Byzantine iconography. In the Orthodox understanding of iconography, what is always portrayed in the icon is the final result, of a Christ-centered life, and is seen as the flowering of the Holy Spirit.

Orthodox iconography does not attempt to portray the exact appearance of a saint during their earthly life. The iconographer avoids emphasis on the corrupted human flesh. The icon, which is not a portrait, never conveys man's physical defects; the aging process and sickness is never portrayed at any time. Why do icons in the Orthodox Church look like they do, is a refrain offered by many visitors, and even its very own people?

Facial features on an icon such as the eyes, nose, and fingers can often appear more oblong, and even the head is reduced in size. **What the iconographer depicts is the saint's transformed and deified state, changed by the power of the All-Holy Spirit.** This is why Orthodox iconography can often look radically different from Western art. **The spiritual change is the iconographer's primary emphasis.** The mortal flesh has passed away and we are left, in wonder, to gaze at the change the Holy Spirit has brought forth. And it is a beautiful site to behold.

Saint Gregory of Nyssa wrote that after the resurrection, each person will receive a new body which will be different from the one we passed through this life with. The new body will be devoid of defects, and the new glorified body will be luminous and full of light.

The church reminds us repeatedly that we are created in the image and according to the likeness of God. Is man truly capable of being called an 'Icon of God'? Of course, but the work required will be difficult and life-long. The calling of each Christian is to be the incarnate love of God. When we live in truth, the light, and in love, then the work of the Holy Spirit will be flower within us and others will be drawn to Him, not us. When this happens, we will be transfigured and shine with the light of Risen Christ.

V. Rev. Marc A. Vranes

Written on The Sunday of Orthodoxy

5 March 2017

"This wonderful set of icons is such an incredible addition to our church. The size and presence each of them brings, makes an Orthodox believer truly feel like they are worshiping under the peaceful and instructive gaze of heavenly saints."

*An email from HTOC Parish Council President & Webmaster,
Mr Timothy Fetzko, to Cveta Marinova,
2 July 2018.*

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*Thank you. May God repay.
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