



**The Orthodox Parish
of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
Lancaster, UK.**

The Stavronian

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*Ἐπιθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962).*

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of the British Isles and Ireland.
The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.
Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Bishop Silouan.
Our Patriarch is His Beatitude John X.*

*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)*

Often, goes the Christ in the stranger's guise

ENCOUNTERS WITH SAINTS

The Holy 40 Martyrs of Sebastia (Sebaste)

I first encountered the Holy 40 Martyrs of Sebaste in an icon, which aroused my curiosity because there is so much happening in this particular icon. I couldn't help wondering who were all the many people and what every detail meant. I immediately looked up the Holy martyrs of Sebastia and found to my great astonishment that I had always kept their feast day on the 9th March (everybody in Romania does) without even knowing who they were. The story of the 40 martyrs is one which inspired and struck me with awe.

In the year 320, during the Christian persecutions under Licinius, 40 soldiers of the Legio XII Fulminata, who confessed to being Christians, were thrown in prison in the city of Sebaste in Armenia (modern day Turkish territory). After 8 days in prison, they were stripped of their clothes and made to stand naked

in the freezing waters of a lake at dusk. On the shore, their guards built fires with hot baths to entice them to renounce their faith. During the night, the martyrs encouraged each other and prayed incessantly. One of the forty could bear the cold no longer and ran out of the lake into one of the hot baths. He died instantly. One of the guards, who was awake, saw a great light descend from the sky upon the men in the lake as well as forty golden crowns. Realizing there were only 39 men left, yet 40 crowns, he stripped his clothes and ran into the lake, declaring himself to be a Christian too, thus preserving the number of 40 in accordance with the Lord's will. The waters of the lake miraculously warmed up and in the morning all 40 were found still alive. They were taken out of the lake and martyred by fire. Their remains were thrown in the lake to destroy any evidence of them. The following day the remains were found to rise to the surface of the lake and the relics of the forty martyrs are spread throughout the world for veneration.



The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebasteia (image [source](#))

There are many wonderful things about this martyrdom as depicted in the icon. I am moved particularly by the communal martyrdom. The idea of community during persecution and departing this life surrounded by one's Christian family: suffering together as one, trusting in God as one, encouraging each other and ultimately passing away together. It is very beautiful and heartening. But the unsettling part is the last-minute defection of one of the Christians. As a dear friend of mine once said. "Would that man be me? Or would I stand in the frozen lake to the end?" Or in point of fact, will I endure whatever comes my way in faith to the end. It is a question which we cannot answer until the very end, but one which is very sobering.

Lastly, but mostly, the addition of the guard to the martyrs is in my eyes the most wonderful part of the story because it blurs the separating lines which people are so fond of drawing between different groups. There is always an us and them. In this case the persecutors and the martyrs, the evil ones and the holy ones. But as we see again and again in the scriptures, God calls us all to holiness, tax collectors, prostitutes and persecutors themselves. Salvation is possible at any moment for anybody through God's grace. All it takes is saying yes and running to the Lord. As Saul the persecutor of Christians later became St Paul the great Apostle, so the guard, Aglaios, in the space of one night joins the rank of saints straight from the body of evil doers.

We can clearly see in the icon, the man who turns away from God to enter the warm bath and the guard, usually holding a red cloth to single him out, joining the martyrs. These two swap places, crossing lines in opposite directions, away from and towards Christ Himself who bestows crowns upon the 40.

On this feast day of the Holy Martyrs, on the 9th March, there is a tradition in Romania to prepare a fasting dish called Mucenici (which means Martyrs). In some regions it takes the form of 40 baked sweet breads in the shape of number 8, in others of small pasta shapes in the same shape (to remind us of the 8 days spent in prison by the martyrs) which float on a "lake" of sweet spiced liquid.

May the Holy 40 Martyrs pray for us that we may be granted the strength to stand firm in our faith until the very end.

Alexandra McCafferty

Troparion (Tone 1)

*Together let us honor the holy company
united by faith,
Those noble warriors of the Master of all.
They were divinely enlisted for Christ,
And passed through fire and water.
Then they entered into refreshment praying
for those who cry:
Glory to him who has strengthened you!
Glory to him who has crowned you!
Glory to him who has made you wonderful,
O holy Forty Martyrs!*

Kontakion (Tone 6)

*You abandoned all earthly armies,
Cleaving to the heavenly Master, O Forty
Martyrs of the Lord.
Having passed through fire and water, O
Blessed Ones,
You have fittingly received heavenly glory
and many crowns.*

THOUGHTS ON THE LENTEN FAST

I am the last person who should be talking about fasting from food. I find fasting very difficult, but I have experienced its blessings enough to know that it is something I must attempt even if I fail again and again.

It is one of the great paradoxes that the more we have, the harder it is to give things up. We are so used to abundance that denying ourselves treats appears in the light of a great hardship. We live in a society where fasting/vegan foods are easily accessible and yet, as Christians in the West we appear to fast less and less because we find it very hard to refuse things that our body asks for.

Scientific research is increasingly telling us that fasting for 24 hours or refraining from overindulging is beneficial to our health. This is no news for Christians or Jews. Scripture has been telling us the same thing for thousands of years. Fasting is beneficial spiritually, but also to our body. There are of course exceptions and the

church in its economia, tells us to adapt our fasting to our health circumstances. Wisdom and measure have to prevail in all things and our spiritual father knows what each of us can endure as privation, since our physical strength and mental health differ greatly from person to person. I very much enjoyed this short excerpt from Deacon Jeremiah's article in the on-line magazine Pravmir:

I try to fast in a way that makes the spoiled little brat inside me flustered but doesn't keep me hangry (hungry and angry). Balance doesn't mean finding ways to fit Orthodoxy into my schedule. Instead, it is finding who I am in the Church, what my limitations are, and how I can stretch a little without breaking.

It is useful to remind ourselves, first of all that fasting from food is not an add-on or simply a church tradition, but it originates in the Gospel and is to be found in the Old Testament too. As Metropolitan Silouan said in his sermon at the beginning of Lent one year, it is through eating the forbidden fruit that man and woman first sinned; therefore, it is through refraining from food that man and woman must repent. Countless times fasting is mentioned in the Old Testament and the Gospels. Moses fasted before receiving the tablets of the Law: *"So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. He wrote on the tablets the word of the covenant, the ten commandments."* (Exodus 34:28). Elijah fasted before meeting the Lord on Mount Horeb: *"So he arose, ate and drank; and he went with the strength of that food forty days and forty nights, as far as mount Horeb"* (3 Kingdoms 19:12) and Ezra proclaims a fast for the people of God in preparation for the return of Israel to the promised land from exile: *"Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek from him the right way for us.[...] So we fasted and entreated our God for this, and He answered our prayer."* (2 Ezra 8:21)

Fasting is therefore the thousands of year old way of preparing ourselves for meeting the Lord, it is a companion to journeying towards God's promise and an encounter with The most Holy One. Our Lord Jesus Christ, the sinless One, very God of very God, *"was led up by the Spirit into*

the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. And when He had fasted forty days and forty nights afterwards he was hungry" If our God Himself fasted, how much more need for us sinners to fast! Through the impulses of the body comes the first temptation, as the evil one says to Our Lord: *"If you are the Son of God command that these stones become bread."*; but in His answer, Christ offers us the solution to resist the temptations of the body: *"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."* (Matthew 4:1-5)

Our Lord tells us not only that fast is necessary and a companion to prayer but gives us clear guidance how to fast: *"When you fast, anoint your head and wash your face so that you do not appear to men to be fasting, but to your Father who is in the secret place; and your father who sees in secret will reward you openly"*. Our Lord gives the same guidance about the other two essential acts of worship during Lent: prayer and almsgiving: they are to be done discreetly, but they are to be all three performed.

In Matthew 17:21 Jesus tells of casting out a difficult demon: *"this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"*. When fasting accompanies prayer, it is like incense rising up to the Lord and prayers are answered because they are made in humility and repentance, in sacrifice and trust in the Lord. We see this in the church of the first century. Before setting off on any mission, Christians would fast and pray together. *"Then having fasted and prayed and laid hands on them, they sent them away."* (Acts 13:3) Thus Saul and Barnabas set off on their apostolic mission.

Having seen how important fasting is, we must also be mindful of the many temptations and traps it can occasion. It is easy to fall into the trap of viewing fasting as a diet and we become so obsessed with the letter of the law that we forget that it is in fact only the first step in the spiritual battle. Refraining from food has to be accompanied by refraining from gossip, evil thoughts and unkind acts. Fasting has to go hand in hand with prayer otherwise its spiritual value is wasted. But more dangerous than all other and much more dangerous than not fasting is the sin of pride.

"If you fast regularly, do not be inflated with pride; if you think highly of yourself because

of it, then you had better eat meat. It is better for a man to eat meat than to be inflated with pride and glorify himself." (Abba Isidore in "The Desert Fathers".)

We see this very pride in the Pharisee who keeps the law to the letter, but all to no avail because he does it out of pride instead of doing it for love. *"I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess". (Luke 18:11)*

Let us therefore pray that we may begin the Lenten fast with humble hearts and a sincere desire to be pleasing to the Lord in our poor sacrifices.

Fasting is an exceptional virtue; it represses bodily impulses and gives strength to the soul to fight against the poisoning of the heart through the senses, and provides it with a remedy against any past poisoning. Fasting causes the mind to be cleansed constantly. It withers up every evil thought and brings healthy, godly thoughts -- holy thoughts that enlighten the mind and kindle it with more zeal and spiritual fervor. (Elder Ephraim of Philotheou Mount Athos, "Counsels from the Holy Mountain".)

Mary and Martha

NAMES OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES TO BE REMEMBERED THIS MONTH

Mar. 4: Nikolaos

Mar. 12: Georgianna

Mar. 18: Fr. Thomas Hopko

Mar. 19: Metropolitan Philip of North America, and Fr. Georgios Myrou

MEMORY ETERNAL!

Please send us the names of your departed loved ones and date of their departure in order for them to be remembered.

MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

1st Mar: St. David of Wales (†589)

2nd Mar: Our Holy fathers St Nicholas Planas & St Joachim of Ithaca and Vatopaedi

9th Mar: The Holy Forty Martyrs of Sebastia

14th Mar: Forgiveness Sunday

15th Mar: Clean Monday; Lent starts today.

17th Mar: St Patrick, the Enlightener of Ireland (†492)

20th Mar: St Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne (†687)

21st Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

25th Mar: The Annunciation of our Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary

30th Mar: St John Climacus the righteous, author of the Divine Ladder of Ascent

31st Mar: St. Innocent, Enlightener of Siberia & Alaska

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org



Sunday of Orthodoxy (image [source](#))

Services at St Martin's in March*

Mon. 1st	18:30	Vespers for St Joachim of Ithaca and St Nikolaos Planas of Athens
Wed. 3rd	19:00	Little Paraklesis to the Mother of God
Sat. 6th	10:00	Saturday of Souls
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 7th	09:45	Holy Liturgy Sunday of the Last Judgement (in Church)
Mon. 8th	18:30	Vespers for the Forty Martyrs of Sebaste
Wed. 10th	19:00	Little Paraklesis to the Mother of God
Sat. 13th	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 14th	09:45	Divine Liturgy (in Church). Sunday of Cheesefare: The expulsion of Adam from Paradise
Mon. 15th	18:30	Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete
Tue. 16th	18:30	Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete
Wed. 17th	18:30	Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete
Thru. 18th	18:30	Great Canon of St Andrew of Crete
Fri. 19th	18:30	First Akathist to the Mother of God
Sat. 20th	10:00	Memorial
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 21st	09:45	Holy Liturgy of St Basil (in Church). First Sunday of Great Lent: Sunday of Orthodoxy
Wed. 24th	19:00	Little Paraklesis to the Mother of God
Thru. 25th	08:30	Orthros for the Annunciation of the Theotokos
Fri. 26th	18:30	Second Akathist to the Mother of God
Sat. 27th	10:00	Saturday of Souls
	18:30	Great Vespers
Sun. 28th	09:45	Holy Liturgy of St Basil (in Church). Second Sunday of Great Lent: St Gregory Palamas
Wed. 31st	19:00	Little Paraklesis to the Mother of God

* The services are provisional and may be changed at short notice. Services will take place in Skype unless otherwise stated. Services marked as "in Church" involve temporarily a priest, a chanter, and a server only. Please, join a [Skype group](#) to watch or participate in a current service. The live services are also broadcasted simultaneously in the [Facebook group](#) of the Church.

“God cares for everyone. Despair is in effect a lack of faith”

- St. George Karslides –



For further information please contact:

Father Jonathan Hemmings

67 Sibsey Str., Fairfield, Lancaster, LA1 5DQ

Tel: 07951 722 877

Email: frjah@yahoo.co.uk

www.orthodox-lancaster.org.uk

www.antiochian-orthodox.co.uk

The following blogs of Old Stavronians are available in Romanian, Conștiinta Ortodoxa,
in English, Orthodox city hermit, and in Greek, Orthodoxy rainbow.

