

## Great Martyr Procopius of Cæsarea, in Palestine

*Commemorated on 8 July*

The Holy Great Martyr Procopius, in the world Neanius, a native of Jerusalem, lived and suffered during the reign of the emperor Diocletian (284-305). His father, an eminent Roman by the name of Christopher, was a Christian, but the mother of the saint, Theodosia, remained a pagan. He was early deprived of his father, and the young child was raised by his mother. Having received an excellent secular education, he was introduced to Diocletian in the very first year of the emperor's accession to the throne, and he quickly advanced in government service. Towards the year 303, when open persecution against Christians began, Neanius was sent as a proconsul to Alexandria with orders to mercilessly persecute the Church of God.



On the way to Egypt, near the Syrian city of Apamea, Neanius had a vision of the Lord Jesus, similar to the vision of Saul on the road to Damascus. A divine voice exclaimed,

*“Neanius, why do you persecute Me?”*

Neanius asked, *“Who are you, Lord?”*

*“I am the crucified Jesus, the Son of God.”*

At that moment a radiant Cross appeared in the air. Neanius felt an inexpressible joy and spiritual happiness in his heart and he was transformed from being a persecutor into a zealous follower of Christ. From this point in time Neanius became favorably disposed towards Christians and fought victoriously against the barbarians.

The words of the Savior came true for the saint, “A man's foes shall be those of his own household” (Mt. 10:36). His mother, a pagan herself, went to the emperor to complain that her son did not worship the ancestral gods. Neanius was summoned to the procurator Judæus Justus, where he was solemnly handed the decree of Diocletian. Having read through the blasphemous directive, Neanius quietly tore it up before the eyes of everyone. This was a crime, which the Romans regarded as an “insult to authority.” Neanius was held under guard and in chains sent to Caesarea of Palestine, where the Apostle Paul once languished. After terrible torments, they threw the saint into a dank prison. That night, a light shone in the prison, and the Christ Himself baptized the suffering confessor, and gave him the name **Procopius**, derived from the Greek word meaning «*progress, advancement*».

Repeatedly they led St Procopius to the courtroom, demanding that he renounce Christ, and they subjected him to more tortures. The stolidity of the martyr and his fiery faith brought down God's abundant grace on those who witnessed the execution. Inspired by the example of Procopius, many of the holy martyr's former guards and Roman soldiers went beneath the executioner's sword together with their tribunes Nikostrates and Antiochus. Twelve Christian women received martyr's crowns, after they came to the gates of the Cæsarea Prætorium.

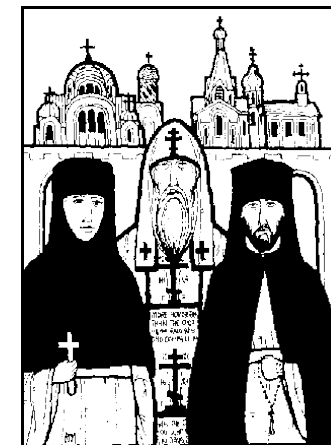
Struck by the great faith and courage of the Christians, and seeing the firmness of her son in bearing terrible sufferings, Theodosia became repentant and stood in the line of confessors and was executed. Finally the new procurator, Flavian, convinced of the futility of the tortures, sentenced the holy Great Martyr Procopius to beheading by the sword. By night Christians took up his much-tortured body, and with tears and prayers, they committed it to the earth. This was the first martyrdom at Cæsarea (303).



### ~ Eastern Monasticism ~

On **July 10<sup>th</sup>** we honor our **Venerable Father Anthony of the Kyiv Caves**, founder of monastic life in Kyivan Rus'-Ukraine. What is monasticism? What kind of life does a monk or nun have? In the Eastern Christian tradition, monasticism is often called the “**barometer of the spiritual life of the Church.**”

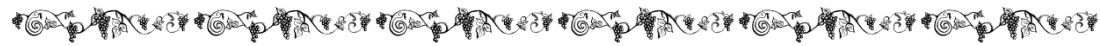
Monasticism is not just a “part” of the greater scope of Eastern Christian life; it is the very center and heart of the Church, in relation to which other aspects of her life are born and grow. The monastics (both men and women) are those who choose to follow with singular devotion and obedience the call of Christ, to live the life of the Church in a direct and immediate manner. They are thus the models in which the Church sees her perfect icon: a communion of souls wholly living the life in Christ.



Christian monasticism took its practical roots in the early fourth century, though there were individuals and communities living austere, solitary, and ascetic lives long before this time. Nonetheless, it was in this era that St. Anthony of Egypt lived and had his story recorded by St. Athanasius, bishop of Alexandria, in the classic text, the Life of St. Antony of Egypt. This book recorded the saint's departure into the solitary deserts of Egypt to live a life wholly devoted to God, modeled on a

daily routine of prayer and manual labor born of the scriptural call to follow the Lord. And what St. Anthony did for the solitary life, so did St. Pachomius for the communal (after the Greek, cenobitic) monastic way. They were two manifestations of a life that spread throughout the Christian world like wildfire. Within the lifetimes of these two founders, thousands of men and women began fleeing the cities for the solitude of the desert, and the recognizable conception of the monastic life was born.

That life has continued throughout the whole of Christian history, giving rise to great saints—both men and women—who modeled a life of devotion to and union with Christ. It continues today, in monasteries, from the greatest ones to the most humble of hermitages, the life of Christ continues to become, day by day, the life of venerable fathers and mothers. Are you interested in monastic life—the heart of the Church? See Father for more information.



### **The Holy Blessed Princess Olha of Rus'-Ukraine**

**July 11**

During the month of July we find many Saints that are close to our Byzantine Catholic Church. This upcoming week we will commemorate the Holy Blessed Princess Olha-Olga. As we celebrate her memory we should take a moment to reflect on the enduring impact of this noble woman on the historical, cultural and national development of Ukraine and Eastern Europe as a whole. Being the grandmother of St. Vladimir-Volodymyr the Great, she truly shaped her grandson into what she knew he would become. She did the same for the peoples and kingdom she ruled over. Who is Saint Olha?



She was renowned for her wisdom and sobriety, and in her youth she became the wife of Ihor, Great Prince of Kyiv, who ruled during the tenth century. After her husband's death, she herself ruled capably, and was finally moved to accept the Faith of Christ. She traveled to Constantinople to receive Holy Baptism. The Emperor, seeing her outward beauty and inward greatness, asked her to marry him. She said she could not do this before she was baptized; she furthermore asked him to be her Godfather at the font, which he agreed to do. After she was baptized (receiving the name of Helen), the Emperor repeated his proposal of marriage. She answered that now he was her father, through holy Baptism, and that not even among the heathen

was it heard of a man marrying his daughter. Gracefully accepting to be outwitted by her, he sent her back to her land with priests and sacred texts and holy icons. Although her son Svyatoslav remained a pagan, she planted the seed of faith in her grandson Volodymyr-Vladimir. The memory of Vladimir-Volodymyr the Great we will celebrate July 15<sup>th</sup>. Saint Olha after serving her people reposed in peace in the year 969.

*Let us offer praise to God, our Benefactor, Who has greatly glorified divinely-wise and venerable and holy Olha, that by her prayers He grant our souls the forgiveness of sins.*



**THE NARTHEX** – from the Greek **Ναρθεαξ** – parallels the Inner Courtyard in the Jewish Temple that stood in Jerusalem, otherwise known as "**The Court of Israel**". Byzantine Church architecture is a Microcosm, meaning that the Church building itself becomes a symbol of our world and teaches us salvation history. The Narthex represents the **Fallen World** – the area of the church nearest to the west; where the sun sets; where there is darkness and the shadow of death.

#### **Liturgical Rites that take place in the Narthex...**

- The **pre-Baptismal Exorcisms** and in some churches **Baptism** itself takes place in the Narthex. Only after the person is Baptized and Chrismated does he or she enter the Nave of the Church to join all who have been “clothed in Christ”.
- Historically, it was in the Narthex that **Penitents** had their place. Only after their penance had been completed – some lasted for years! – were they allowed to enter the Nave with the rest of the congregation and receive the Divine Eucharist.
- The **Betrothal** at weddings still takes place here.
- In some Byzantine Churches, the prayers of “**churching of a mother 40 days after giving birth**” are said here.
- Certain Vesperal prayers – the **Litya** – and rites, and at Great Compline of the Nativity of our Lord Jesus Christ, **prayers for the world** are offered in the Narthex.

With this understanding of the role of the Narthex in Byzantine Church architecture, it is hoped that proper etiquette, appropriate behavior will be better observed in this sacred space!