Date: December 23, 2025
Subject: BURL-Choir Holy Forefathers (Sv. Praotsti) Weekend NOTICE

Dorogiye!

This Saturday-Sunday, being the next-to-last weekend before Nativity of the Lord, the Church commemorates the Holy Forefathers, the ancestors of Christ, who lived before the Law and under the Law, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God said, “In thy seed shall all of the nations of the earth be blessed”. Next Saturday-Sunday, being the weekend before Nativity of the Lord, the Church will commemorate the Holy Fathers - all those who were well-pleasing to God from all ages, from Adam to Saint Joseph the Betrothed of the Most Holy Theotokos. These special commemorations remind us of the righteous ones who were involved in the events leading up to the Nativity of the Lord.

All the great Fathers and Mothers and Prophets of the Old Testament, starting with Adam, Abraham, the Righteous Sarah, Isaac and Jacob, including Holy Prophet Elias and Daniel, and concluding with Holy Prophet Zechariah (Zachary), Joachim and Anna, Holy Prophet and Forerunner John the Baptist and The Theotokos. They lived before the Law and under the Law, especially the Patriarch Abraham, to whom God said, "In thy seed shall all of the nations of the earth be blessed”.

The Church brings them to our attention now, right before Christmas, largely because of their faith – their belief in the promise given by God to Adam during his expulsion from the garden of Eden, that in the end a Saviour will come into the world and will redeem mankind from original sin. All the forefathers – who lived on earth long before the birth of Christ – lived and burned with this faith, never allowing it to be extinguished. They are a shining example to us, who are living on earth after the incarnation of our Lord. Just like those ancient people we, too, have never actually seen Christ: they only knew that He would come into the world, while we know that He did come into the world. But they firmly believed in His coming and their faith was justified.

The attached Tropar/Kondak text sheet includes the special prayers that will be sung on Saturday at Vigil and Sunday at Liturgy.

Earlier, this Wednesday / Thursday, the Church commemorates Saint Herman (in Russian, German) of Alaska and Saint Spyridon, the Wonderworker, Bishop of Tremithus (in Slavonik: Trimifunt), a village in the Larnaca District, Western part of Cyprus).

Brief summaries about Saint Herman and Saint Spyridon are provided below.

**** SAINT HERMAN OF ALASKA

Saint Herman was born in Serpukhov, Russia, around the year 1756. He became a monk at the age of 16; first at the Holy Trinity-St. Sergius Hermitage and then later at the Valaam Monastery. In 1793, Metropolitan Gabriel of Novgorod and St Petersburg asked Igumen Nazarii to choose a group of monks from Valaam Monastery who would form a missionary team. The task of this mission team was to travel across Russia and Siberia and to begin evangelization of Russian America (Alaska). Other members of this missionary team were Archimandrite Joasaph, who was the priest-in-charge, Hieromonks Juvenaly, Macarius, Athanasius, Stephen and Nectarius, Hierodeacons Nectarius and Stephen, and Monks Joasaph and Herman. On September 24th, 1794, after journeying for nearly a year, the group of eight monks arrived on Kodiak Island. A bilingual school (Russian and Aleut) was established for the natives. Some of

the team traveled to other parts of Alaska taking the Gospel to the people who lived in these other areas. So at times it was necessary for Father Herman to keep charge of the Kodiak Mission and administer the school. Between 1808 and 1818, Father Herman left Kodiak in order to live on Spruce Island, which he called New Valaam. He remained on Spruce Island for the remainder of his blessed life, where he cared for orphans, ran a school for native children and continued his missionary work.

Father Herman wore the simplest of clothes under his cassock and ate very little, living a strict ascetic life. Father Herman devoted all of his free time to prayer and singing of services. When asked if he was lonely on Spruce Island, Father Herman replied, "No, I am not alone there! God is there, as God is everywhere." Father Herman was once invited aboard a ship that had docked in Kodiak and during a conversation with those on board, he asked them what it was that would bring them the most happiness. Some wanted wealth, others wanted a top ranking job in the Navy another wanted a beautiful wife etc. "What could be better, higher, more worthy of love and more splendid than Our Lord Jesus Christ Himself, Who created the world, adorns, gives life, sustains, nourishes and loves everything - Who is Himself love. Should we not love God above all things, and wish for and seek Him?"

The reply was, "Why that's obvious, how can we not love God?" And Father Herman responded "I, a poor sinner, have been trying to learn how to love God for more than 40 years, and I cannot say that I yet love Him properly. If we love someone, we always remember them, we try to please them continually. Day and night we are concerned about them. Our mind and our heart is concerned with the object of our love. How do you love God? Do you turn to Him often? Do you always remember Him? Do you always pray to Him and keep His commandments?" The crew admitted that they did not.
"Then, for our good and for our happiness, let us all make a vow: at least from this day, this hour, this very minute, we should strive to love God above all else and do His will!" Father Herman reposed on December 13th, 1837. Although he was revered as a saint by the native people of Alaska, he was officially glorified as a saint in the Orthodox Church on August 9th, 1970.
His relics remain to this day in Holy Resurrection Cathedral on Kodiak Island. A Pilgrimage is held every year in August to celebrate St. Herman of Alaska.

**** SAINT SPYRIDON THE WONDERWORKER, BISHOP OF TREMITHUS

Saint Spyridon of Tremithus was born towards the end of the third century on the island of Cyprus. He was a shepherd, and had a wife and children. He used all his substance for the needs of his neighbors and the homeless, for which the Lord rewarded him with a gift of wonderworking. He healed those who were incurably sick, and cast out demons. After the death of his wife, during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337), he was made Bishop of Tremithus, Cyprus. As a bishop, the saint did not alter his manner of life, but combined pastoral service with deeds of charity. According to the witness of Church historians, Saint Spyridon participated in the sessions of the First Ecumenical Council in the year 325. At the Council, the saint entered into a dispute with a Greek philosopher who was defending the Arian heresy. The power of Saint Spyridon's plain, direct speech showed everyone the importance of human wisdom before God's Wisdom: "Listen, philosopher, to what I tell you. There is one God Who created man from dust. He has ordered all things, both visible and invisible, by His Word and His Spirit. The Word is the Son of God, Who came down upon the earth on account of our sins. He was born of a Virgin, He lived among men, and suffered and died for our salvation, and then He arose from the dead, and He has resurrected the human race with Him.
We believe that He is one in essence (consubstantial) with the Father, and equal to Him in authority and honor. We believe this without any sly rationalizations, for it is impossible to grasp this mystery by human reason." As a result of their discussion, the opponent of Christianity became the saint's zealous defender and later received holy Baptism. After his conversation with Saint Spyridon, the philosopher turned to his

companions and said, “Listen! Until now my rivals have presented their arguments, and I was able to refute their proofs with other proofs. But instead of proofs from reason, the words of this Elder are filled with some sort of special power, and no one can refute them, since it is impossible for man to oppose God. If any of you thinks as I do now, let him believe in Christ and join me in following this man, for God Himself speaks through his lips.”

At this Council, Saint Spyridon displayed the unity of the Holy Trinity in a remarkable way. He took a brick in his hand and squeezed it. At that instant fire shot up from it, water dripped on the ground, and only dust remained in the hands of the wonderworker. “There was only one brick,” Saint Spyridon said, “but it was composed of three elements. In the Holy Trinity there are three Persons, but only one God.” The saint cared for his flock with great love. Through his prayers, drought was replaced by abundant rains, and incessant rains were replaced by fair weather. Through his prayers, the sick were healed and demons cast out.

A woman once came up to him with a dead child in her arms, imploring the intercession of the saint. He prayed, and the infant was restored to life. The mother, overcome with joy, collapsed lifeless. Through the prayers of the saint of God, the mother was restored to life.

Another time, hastening to save his friend, who had been falsely accused and sentenced to death, the saint was hindered on his way by the unanticipated flooding of a stream. The saint commanded the water: “Halt! For the Lord of all the world commands that you permit me to cross so that a man may be saved.” The will of the saint was fulfilled, and he crossed over unhindered to the other shore. The judge, apprised of the miracle that had occurred, received Saint Spyridon with esteem and set his friend free.

Similar instances are known from the life of the saint. Once, he went into an empty church, and ordered that the lampadas and candles be lit, and then he began the service. When he said, “Peace be unto all,” both he and the deacon heard from above the resounding of a great multitude of voices saying, “And with thy spirit.” This choir was majestic and more sweetly melodious than any human choir. To each petition of the litanies, the invisible choir sang, “Lord, have mercy.” Attracted by the church singing, the people who lived nearby hastened towards it. As they got closer and closer to the church, the wondrous singing filled their ears and gladdened their hearts. But when they entered into the church, they saw no one but the bishop and several church servers, and they no longer heard the singing (of Angels) that had greatly astonished them.

Saint Simeon Metaphrastes, the author of his Life, likened Saint Spyridon to the Patriarch Abraham in his hospitality. Sozomen, in his Church History, offers an amazing example from the life of the saint of how he received strangers. One time, at the start of the Forty-day Fast, a stranger knocked at his door. Seeing that the traveler was very exhausted, Saint Spyridon said to his daughter, “Wash the feet of this man, so he may recline to dine.” But since it was Lent there were none of the necessary provisions, for the saint “partook of food only on certain days, and on other days he went without food.” His daughter replied that there was no bread or flour in the house. Then Saint Spyridon, apologizing to his guest, ordered his daughter to cook a salted ham from their larder. After seating the stranger at table, he began to eat, urging that man to do the same. When the latter refused, calling himself a Christian, the saint rejoined, “It is not proper to refuse this, for the Word of God proclaims, ‘Unto the pure all things are pure’”. Another historical detail reported by Sozomen, was characteristic of the saint. It was his custom to distribute one part of the gathered harvest to the destitute, and another portion to those having need while in debt. He did not take a portion for himself, but simply showed them the entrance to his storeroom, where each could take as much as was needed, and could later pay it back in the same way, without records or accounting.

There is also the tale by Socrates Scholasticus about how robbers planned to steal the sheep of Saint Spyridon. They broke into the sheepfold at night, but here they found themselves all tied up by some invisible power. When morning came the saint went to his flock, and seeing the tied-up robbers, he prayed and released them. For a long while he advised them to leave their path of iniquity and earn their livelihood by respectable work. Then he made them a gift of a sheep and sending them off, the saint said kindly, “Take this for your trouble, so that you did not spend a sleepless night in vain.”

All the Lives of the saint speak of the amazing simplicity and the gift of wonderworking granted him by God. Through a word of the saint the dead were awakened, the elements of nature tamed, the idols smashed. At one point, a Council had been convened at Alexandria by the Patriarch to discuss what to do about the idols and pagan temples there. Through the prayers of the Fathers of the Council all the idols fell down except one, which was very much revered. It was revealed to the Patriarch in a vision that this idol had to be shattered by Saint Spyridon of Tremithus.

Invited by the Council, the saint set sail on a ship, and at the moment the ship touched shore and the saint stepped out on land, the idol in Alexandria with all its offerings turned to dust, which then was reported to the Patriarch and all the bishops.  Saint Spyridon lived his earthly life in righteousness and sanctity, and prayerfully surrendered his soul to the Lord. His relics repose on the island of Corfu (Northwestern Greece), in a church named after him. His right hand, however, is located in Rome.  His memory is also celebrated on Cheesefare Saturday.