

## **Lives of the Saints**

### **Our Holy Father Theophan the Recluse (+1894)**

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

This modern-day Church Father was born in Chernavsk in central Russia. The son of a priest, he entered seminary at a young age, and then completed the four-year course in theology at the Academy of Kiev. Though he distinguished himself as a student, his heart turned increasingly toward the monastic life, and he was tonsured a monk and ordained a priest upon completion of his studies. During his time at the Academy he often visited the Lavra of the Caves, and there became a spiritual child of Father Parthenius (March 25).

His desire for monastic life was not fulfilled immediately, for the Church felt need of his intellectual gifts. He served as a professor at the Theological Academy in St Petersburg, then worked for seven years in the Russian Mission to the Near East, mostly in Palestine. During this time he gained a perfect mastery of Greek and studied the works of the Church Fathers in the original languages. Returning to Russia, he was soon consecrated a bishop; but after seven years of episcopal service, he at last achieved his heart's desire, resigning as bishop and retiring to a small monastery at Yvschen, where he spent the rest of his days.

After taking full part in the liturgical and communal life of the monastery for several years, he took up the life of a recluse in 1872. He lived in two small rooms, subsisting almost entirely on bread and tea, visited only by his confessor and the abbot of the monastery. He celebrated the Divine Liturgy every day in his cell. All of his time not taken up by inner prayer was devoted to translating the works of the Fathers into Russian and, increasingly, to writings of his own. Most importantly, he prepared a Russian-language edition of the Philokalia which had a deep impact upon Russian spiritual life.

Though he received no visitors, St Theophan entered into correspondence with many earnest Christians who sought his counsel,

and so in time became the spiritual father of many believers throughout Russia. He reposed in peace in 1894.

In addition to the Philokalia, St Theophan produced (among other works):

A Spiritual Psalter of selections from St Ephraim the Syrian; The Path to Salvation, an exposition of Orthodox Spirituality written in clear, plain language for those living in the world; Collections of his letters to spiritual children; and Unseen Warfare, a treatise on prayer and the ascetical life. This last has an unusual history. In its original form it was written by Lorenzo Scupoli, an Italian Roman Catholic priest. St Nikodemos of the Holy Mountain, recognizing the book's merit, produced a Greek edition in which he corrected various deviations from Orthodoxy in the original. St Theophan in turn revised the Greek edition extensively, removing some material and adding passages of his own; so that the Italian, Greek and Russian versions are in fact three substantially different books.

Many of St Theophan's works, including Unseen Warfare, are available in good English translations. They are almost unique in presenting the undiluted hesychastic spirituality of the Orthodox Church in plain, straightforward language accessible to most people.

## **Focus on the Faith – A New Year's Story**

### **John The Blessed**

Translation of a St. Basil's day Story by Photios Kontoglou

Once Christmas had passed, Saint Basil the Great took his staff into his hand and went round about to all the villages to see who would celebrate his feast day with a pure heart. He passed through many diverse hamlets and towns, but no matter whose door he knocked on, they would not open to him because they took him to be a vagabond. He left each town embittered because, though he himself was in no need from men, he understood how much anguish would fill some poor man's heart because of the pitilessness which these selfish men displayed. One day, he was just leaving one such heartless village and as he was passing by the cemetery, he saw that the memorials over the

## St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

graves were ramshackle, the crosses were broken or had tumbled down, and jackals had burrowed into the newly-dug graves. Being a saint, he could hear the dead speaking and saying: "While we were in the world above, we toiled, we went through many tribulations and left behind children and grandchildren so that they would light a candle and burn some incense on our behalf. But we don't see anything! Neither a priest standing at our head reading a memorial service nor kolyva. It is as though we left no one behind."

Saint Basil again became grieved and said, "These villagers don't give anything to anyone, neither to the living, nor to the dead." He made his way out of the cemetery and walked all alone in the frozen snow.

On the eve of his feast, he came to some villages that were the poorest of the poor in Greece. The icy wind moaned as it whipped between the brush and the rocks. There was not a living soul in sight. The night was pitch black. Behind him he espied a small hillock and at the foot of it there was tucked away a cabin next to a sheepfold. Saint Basil went into the enclosure and knocked on the cabin door with his staff and shouted, "Have mercy on a poor man for the sake of the souls of your dead ones and may Christ provide for your needs in this world!" The dogs awoke and jumped towards him, but no sooner had they come close and smelled him when they began wagging their tails and rolling at his feet, whining imploringly and joyfully. At that very instant, the door opened and out stepped a shepherd, a bearded young man some twenty-five years old. It was John Barbakos, a simple-hearted, rough-hewn man of the earth. Before he had even taken a good look to see who had knocked at the door, he said, "Come in, come in! Good morning !"

"May you be blessed, you and your household and your sheep. May the peace of God be upon you." Inside the cabin, a lamp shone where it hung near a cradle which was suspended from two beams. Next to the hearth there was some bedding and John's wife was sleeping there. When Saint Basil stepped in, John took his hand and kissed it and said, "Give me your blessing, Elder." He said this as though he had known him for years, as though he were speaking to his father. The Saint said, "May you be blessed, you and your household and your sheep. May the peace of God be upon you." The young woman arose and she too came and bowed and kissed his hand and he blessed her. Saint Basil looked like some poor monk who was a beggar with a wretched old skoufya on

his head; his riassa had holes and was patched, his sandals too were worn through, and he carried an old bag slung over his shoulders.

### Charities

Approximately \$2400 collected for Charities was distributed at Christmas with 25% going to Our Lady of Kazan skete in Santa Rosa and the remaining 75% distributed to families in the Church who have been hard hit by the bad economy. This division was voted upon in a Parish Charities meeting in November that was open to all in the Parish who wanted to attend.

We also distributed 140 toiletry kits with shampoo, soap, toothpaste and toothbrush and other items. These were taken to the San Jose homeless center. Thanks to all who contributed the \$500 it took to buy these items. They were very much appreciated.

On the first Sunday in December Ann Worobey and many helpers made and served a turkey dinner for the homeless at the Sunnyvale Shelter. **January 3<sup>rd</sup>** is the next dinner. We are serving ham. Sign-up sheets have been posted in the church Hall for food items to buy and for volunteers to help with cooking and clean-up. We will be serving dinner to the homeless again on February 7 and March 7 (the first Sundays of the month).

### Upcoming Events

#### **Parish Annual Meeting - Sunday, January 31**

After Divine Liturgy and with a Potluck Lunch. Four parish council members (Brooks Szolyga, Marina Donnellon, John Simmons, and Paul Pilipenko are finishing their terms. If you want to help shape the future direction of the church or desire to be involved with managing some of its processes, the council is the best place for you. You have to be an official church member to be eligible for a council position and to cast a vote at the Annual Meeting. To be a member you need to complete a membership form for St. Nicholas Orthodox Church. If you did not fill one out last year, you will need to fill one before the Annual Meeting to be considered a voting member. There will be a list of current members posted on the board in the church hall.