

Notes from the Sunday Sermon of December 4, 2022

“Bearing with one another in love”: Celebrating the Lives of SS Barbara, John of Damascus, and John Hotovitzky

Sunday’s Scriptures:

Ephesians 4:1-6 (Epistle) / <https://www.oca.org/readings/daily/2022/12/04/4>

Luke 17:12-19 / <https://www.oca.org/readings/daily/2022/12/04/5>

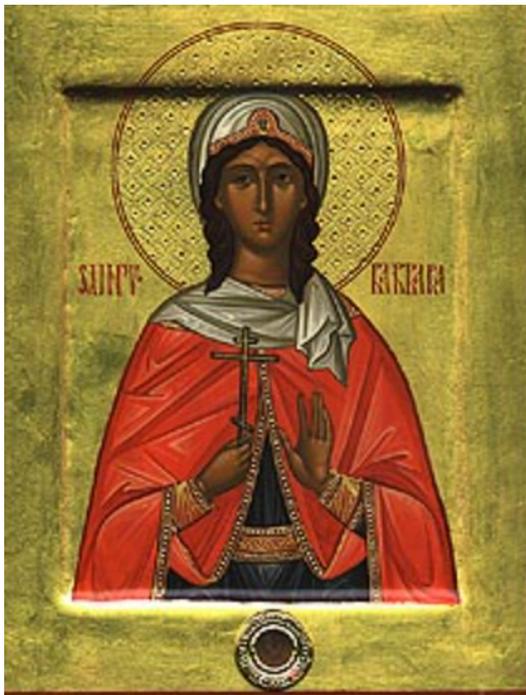
Yesterday I shared a few details about the Baptism and Chrismation of a young girl which took place in our church on Saturday. We think about the Christmas season as having to do with the birth of a child, but in these Sacraments we are reminded again how everyone who is Baptized is “born again” and “puts on Christ” and to be Chrismated - anointed with the consecrated oil called, “Chrism” – is to receive the “gift of the Holy Spirit,” so that God’s holy name might be glorified in how we live.

But how is that done?

We briefly explored examples that had been sent out recently from our daily reader, “**Money and Salvation: An Introduction to the Good Way**” by Andrew Geleris on how Alan Barnhart and numerous saints before him (St. Basil the Great and Philaret the Merciful, among others) had sought to become the “fourth soil” mentioned in the Gospel story of the Seeds and the Sower (Luke 8:4-15). Jesus explained that when a person becomes like the “fourth soil,” they are able with a “good and honest heart, to bring forth fruit with patience.”

Today, in the context of the Gospel and Epistle we gave thanks for the lives of the saints commemorated – **the Great Martyr Barbara, St. John of Damascus, and St. Alexander Hotovitzky, the Priestmartyr**– for they showed us how in becoming the “fourth soil,” it is possible to glorify God’s name under any circumstances and to do so with “**with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love**” (James 4:2).

1) Greatmartyr Barbara:

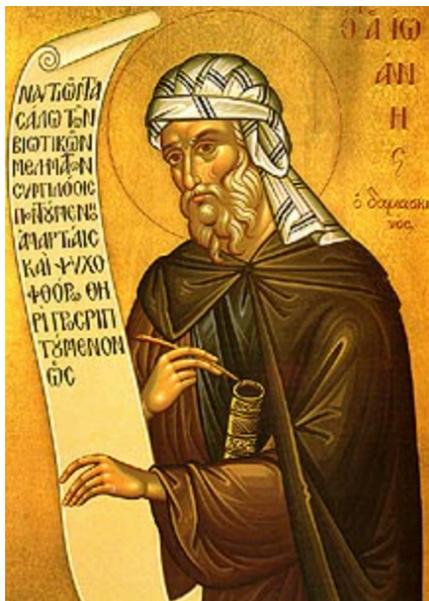


St. Barbara lived in the late 3rd and early 4th centuries in Heliopolis, Syria. An only child, upon her mother's death, her father – a wealthy pagan – became insanely possessive of her. He sheltered her within a tower and limited access to only certain pagan teachers. A beautiful and sensitive child she began to realize as she looked out of the windows that there was something profound about the world that she was not learning from her teachers. She concluded that there must be a certain creator and one who held it all together. Eventually, her father relented and let Barbara leave her confined space. As she wandered about her city, she was influenced by her contact with young Christian women and coming to know God as a Trinity of Persons, was eventually baptized. Her father reacted with terror and violence which eventually led to her death. Her relics eventually were brought to Constantinople and then, through the marriage of Barbara, the daughter of the Byzantine emperor to a Slavic prince, were brought to Kviv where they remain.

Here's more about her life:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/12/04/103472-greatmartyr-barbara-and-martyr-juliana-at-heliopolis-in-syria>

2) St. John of Damascus



St. John grew up in Syria and died in 780. The area was controlled by Moslems and he worked as an advisor to the Caliph before joining the Monastery of St. Sabas, outside of Jerusalem. He was a noted theologian writing on the Orthodox faith and in defense of the legitimacy of iconography - he experienced physical violence from those, including the Orthodox Byzantine emperor, who favored the destruction of icons (the iconoclasts). But he is perhaps best known for his hymnography, particularly for the Paschal/Easter and Funeral Texts which are still sung today.

Here's more about his life:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/12/04/103473-venerable-john-of-damascus>

3) St. Alexander Hotovitzky, Priestmartyr



Fr. Alexander grew up in Russia, but came to the United States in 1894 and stayed until 1914. He served as a pastor, was editor of an influential publication, and worked closely with Archbishop Tikhon (later Patriarch Tikhon) in the mission of the Church in America. He was involved in the establishment of St. Andrew's Church in Philadelphia and St. Nicholas Cathedral in NYC. Returning to Russia in 1917, he served in Moscow and again aided now Patriarch Tikhon as the Church experienced the violence and chaos of the Russian Revolution. He was regularly arrested and persecuted, eventually dying in 1937 as a prisoner. We remember him at every Divine Liturgy, among the "holy wonderworker and enlighteners of North America."

Here's more about his life:

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives/2022/12/04/103471-glorification-of-the-priestmartyr-alexander-hotovitzky>

CONCLUSION: We give thanks today for these three saints who became the "fourth soil," enabling within themselves a place for Christ "to be formed," bearing the difficulties of their lives – from family, from Christians, and from the state – with love.

It's good to be reminded that throughout December and January in particular we celebrate the lives of many saints who glorified God's holy Name in diverse and remarkable ways.

You can learn more about them by looking daily at **the website of the Orthodox Church in America:**

<https://www.oca.org/saints/lives>

Another interesting site which includes both the lives of the daily saints and other reflections is:

***The Prologue of Ochrid* by St. Nicholas Velimirovic:**

https://www.rocor.org.au/?page_id=925