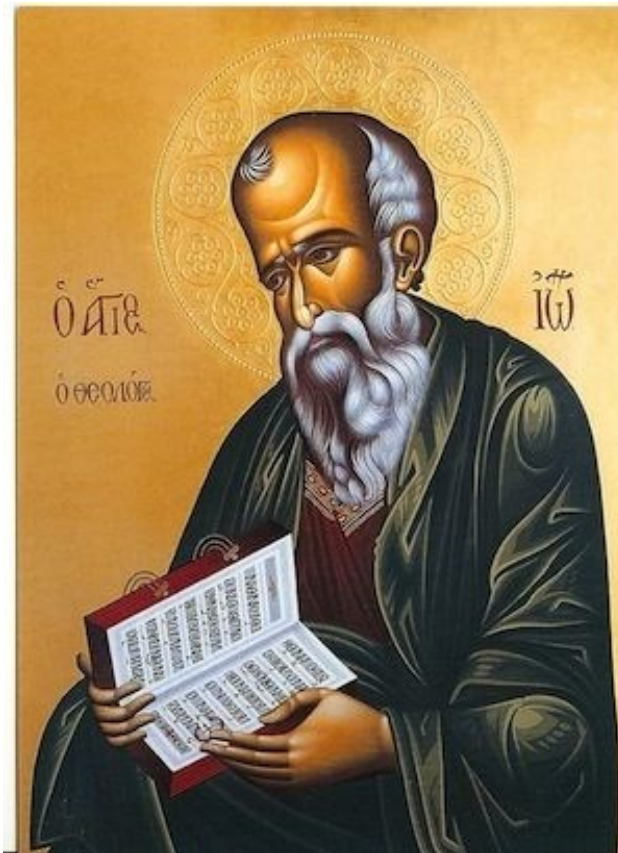


*From the Divine Office for the Commemoration of the Passing of the apostle & Evangelist John (Sept. 26)*

*O Apostle, rivers of theology have poured from your venerable mouth. Watered by them, the Church of God worships the consubstantial Trinity in the orthodox faith. Intercede that the Church be made strong and that we may be saved, O John the Theologian (Vespers)*

*You were called a son of thunder, and you deafened the ears of the ungodly, O apostle John; yet you gently rang out the sweet sound of the Incarnation of the Word to upright hearts. As a true friend, you reclined close to Christ's breast, from which you drew a profound knowledge enabling you to proclaim to all the Word who proceeds from the Father without beginning. O John, intercede with Christ God for those who keep your holy memory with love that they may receive the remission of their sins. (Orthros)*



**FIRST SUNDAY AFTER THE HOLY CROSS  
SEPTEMBER 24, 2023**



**PROTOMARTYR THECLA**

Our Lady of Perpetual Help Melkite Catholic Church  
256 Hamilton St.  
Worcester, MA 01604  
Rectory: (508) 752-4174 Hall: (508) 755-2199  
Email: [olphmelkite@gmail.com](mailto:olphmelkite@gmail.com)/Website: [olphworcester.org](http://olphworcester.org)  
Rev. Bryan McNeil, Pastor  
Cell: (774) 502-8547  
Divine Liturgy: Sunday 10:00 AM

### **Antiphon (3rd)**

1: Come, let us sing joyfully to the Lord; let us shout with joy to God our Savior.

***O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You, Alleluia***

2: Let us come into His presence with thanksgiving and let us joyfully sing psalms to Him.

***Khallsina Ya-Bnallah, Ya Man qama min baynil-amwaat, nahnu muranneemeena Laka.***

***Haleloueya.***

3: For God is a great Lord and a great King over all the earth.

***O Son of God, who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You, Alleluia.***

### **Entrance Hymn**

**Priest: Come, let us worship and bow down before Christ.**

**People: O Son of God Who are risen from the dead, save us who sing to You, Alleluia.**

### **Troparion of the Resurrection (Tone 8) pg. 42**

You descended from on high O compassionate One; and consented to burial for three days that You might free us from suffering. O Lord, our life and our resurrection, glory to You!

### **Patronal Troparion (Tone 1) Pg. 15**

In giving birth, you have preserved your virginity and in falling asleep you did not forsake the world, O Mother of God. You have passed to life being the Mother of Life. Through your intercession, save our souls from death.

### **Kontakion (Tone 2) Pg. 16**

O never failing Protectress of Christians and their ever-present intercessor before the Creator, despise not the petitions of us sinners, but in your goodness extend your help to us who call upon you with confidence. Hasten, O Mother of God, to intercede for us, for you have always protected those who honor you.

### **St Thekla and the Defile**

Stories of St Thekla often tell how she was protected from being defiled by “a defile”. “To defile” means to debase or render impure, but “a defile” is a narrow crevice affording passage through mountains. In a number of stories about St Thekla it is said that she was pursued by people intending to defile her. In some versions her pursuer is a would-be lover frustrated by her commitment to chastity. In other versions pagans, resenting her success at proclaiming the Gospel, pursue her in order to silence her. In all versions Thekla flees into the mountains where a defile opens up allowing her to pass through it unharmed. Churches or shrines to St Thekla were often placed near mountain crevices, such as the monastery in Ma'loula, whose name in Aramaic means *entry*.

### **The First Woman Martyr?**

In the Christian East St Thekla is considered the first woman martyred for Christ, much as St Stephen was among men. Yet, as we have seen, Thekla lived a long life and died in peace. How, then is she a martyr?

Thekla was first described as protomartyr among women by St Isidore of Pelusium, a fifth century Egyptian ascetic and friend of Ss Cyril of Alexandria and John Chrysostom. Known for his letters (over 2000 have survived), Isidore wrote to some women ascetics in Alexandria who were facing expulsion from the city for supporting the exiled Athanasius. He extolled “the all-praiseworthy Thekla” as “an eternal monument of purity” and the “head of all women victors and trophy-bearers” (Letter 87). Her “martyrdom” was considered to be all the sufferings she endured for giving herself to Christ. St Thekla thereby became the principal model for Egyptian women ascetics.

Early writers saw the life-long struggle of ascetics such as more intense than the more transient pains of actual martyrs. Their daily struggle with temptation and physical affliction became the “spears and swords” of their martyrdom. Hence St Thekla, as the model for women ascetics was the protomartyr of their kind.

### *From the Vespers for St Thekla*

*O Lord, Thekla followed in the footsteps of the Apostle in chains, casting off the chains of earthly passions; captivated by the power of Your love, she was firmly bound to You, O Savior of our souls.*

*O Lord, Your spotless Protomartyr Thekla was delivered over to the fire, but was not burned since she possessed You as a refreshing dew. She remained safe in the midst of wild beasts, protected as she was by Your hand, O Savior of our souls.*

*As an athlete in your struggles, you overcame the enemy, O blessed Thekla; in martyrdom, you destroyed his schemes. You fled far from Thamyris in order to be espoused to Christ, your true Love. You were the companion of Paul and imitated Stephen in his trial. As the first woman to bear witness to Christ, you have boldness before Him: save our souls from all danger as, in faith, we festively celebrate your sacred memory.*

### **FOOD DONATION BOX**

There is a green box in the narthex for food donations. Once a month, we will deliver whatever we collect to a local charity that helps those with food insecurity. Our first delivery was to Mustard Seed Ministries on August 4. Please buy a couple of extra items when you go the grocery store and put them in the box on your way into the church on Sunday. Thank you in advance for your generosity in helping those who need a little extra assistance!

## DIVINE LITURGY INTENTIONS

Today +Ruth Welsh  
+Mae Yanni

Today's Coffee Hr. is hosted by Antoinette Arraj & Lisa Jagielski

Next Sunday's Coffee Hr. is hosted by Anthony & Diana Esper in celebration of Amen receiving the Sacraments of Initiation

**Please remember in your prayers:** Lorraine Lian, George Arraj, Jr., Ron Abraham, Peter Abraham, Robert Ghiz, Sadie Mirante, Archie Opatka, Katherine Thomas, Charlotte Stockhaus, Richard Abraham, Sr., Frank Boyda, Carol Boyda, Bob Lynch, Joe Najemy, Michael Mooradian, Dennis Desplaines, Michael McNeil, Jeff McNeil, Wyatt William Rahall, Billy Rahall, Dan Rahall, Lauren Abraham, Nicholas Haddad, Elaine Foley, David Ahlin, Elio Kanaan, Tom Sarrouf, Sandra Hanlan, Melissa Kalpakgian, Susan Bailey, those affected by the natural disasters throughout the world, and the people of Ukraine.

If there are people for whom you would like me to pray, please reach out and give me their names. Part of our vocation as Christians is to pray for each other, especially when someone is sick or suffering in any way.

### Last Week's Collection

Weekly	\$ 989
Coffee Hr.	\$ 26
Candles	\$ 43
Flowers	\$ 55
Donations	\$ 200
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$1,313</b>



### FOOD ITEMS FOR SALE

We still have large trays of frozen kibbeh for sale. Each tray has 14 servings. Cost: \$100 per tray.

We also have four assorted pastry tray from the famous Shatilla Bakery in Dearborn, MI. Cost: \$35 per tray.

Get one before they are sold out!

**Welcome to any visitors we have with us this morning! We are happy to have you worship with us.**

**Please join us downstairs in the church hall for the coffee hour so that we can get to know each other better and answer any questions you may have about the parish or the Melkite Church.**

## 100th ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

Our 100th Anniversary will be celebrated on *November 4-5*. We will have Great Vespers followed by a banquet on November 4. On November 5, we will celebrate a hierarchal Divine Liturgy followed by lunch in the parish hall. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend. You should receive an invitation shortly. You may also use the QR Code below to reserve your place. Please be advised that no ticket to the Banquet will be sold at the door.

QR Code



### THANK YOU

Thanks to all who worked so hard to make this year's picnic a success! The weather proved to be a challenge but it did not dampen our spirits. The parking lot was packed and everyone enjoyed the food, music and fellowship! You are all a blessing to the Parish! As a result of all your hard work, we had gross proceeds of **\$18,803** and expenses of **\$4,655** to date. This leaves us with a profit of **\$14,147**. I think it is quite impressive for a six hour festival! It is also due to the incredible generosity of our donors and patrons!

Thank you again for all you do for your parish!



## September 24 – St Thekla, the First Woman Martyr and Equal to the Apostles

FROM SEPTEMBER, 2013 TO APRIL, 2014 government and rebel forces struggled for control of the ancient Christian town of Ma'loula, Syria, a UNESCO World Heritage site and home to a number of shrines and monasteries. One of them is the ancient Orthodox women's monastery of St Thekla from which 12 nuns were abducted and held by rebel forces for three months.

Almost unknown in the West today, St Thekla was held in great esteem in the early Church and is still revered in the Christian East. Her festival, on September 24, has attracted pilgrims since at least the fourth century. Today both Christians and Muslims pray at her shrine in this venerable town.

### Who Was St Thekla?

The story of St Thekla is told in the *Acts of Paul and Thekla*, a late first or early second century work written in the lifetime of the apostle John the Theologian but not by him. It is considered apocryphal, chiefly because its teachings are not consistent with those of St Paul in the canonical Scriptures.

In this work Thekla is said to be a daughter of an aristocratic family in Iconium (modern Konya in Asia Minor) who heard St Paul preaching during his stay there (see Acts of the Apostles 14:1-7). She was so captivated by Paul's preaching that her mother and fiancé denounced him to the authorities and he was jailed. Thekla bribed the guards to gain entry to the prison and spent the night listening to Paul. When she was discovered, she too was arrested and condemned to death so that "all the women who have been taught by this man may be afraid."

Thekla was convinced of the truth of the Gospel and was ready to renounce everything she had for its sake. She was taken to the outdoor theater and placed on a pyre. Then, as the *Acts of Paul and Thekla* tells it, "They lighted the fire. And though a great fire was blazing, it did not touch her. For God, having compassion upon her, made an underground rumbling and a cloud full of water and hail overshadowed the theater from above" (¶ 22). In the storm which followed the earthquake the pyre was overturned and Thekla was saved.

In the Scriptural Acts of the Apostles we are told that, when St Paul left Iconium he went to Lystra. In the apocryphal Acts we are told that he went to Antioch, taking Thekla with him. In any case, Thekla spent the rest of a long life near Seleucia (modern Silifke, in southern Turkey) where she "enlightened many and died in peace." Because of the many people Thekla brought to Christ in that pagan region the Church accords her the title "Equal to the Apostles."

Many early writers in both East and West revered St Thekla as a model for devout women, particularly ascetics. Thus other notable women such as St Macrina and St Melany the Roman were described as "second Theklas" by eminent Church Fathers St Gregory of Nyssa and St Jerome.

### The Tomb of St Thekla

The cave near Silifke, in which Thekla reputedly lived as an ascetic and was buried, was revered locally during the time of the Roman persecutions. As St Gregory the Theologian wrote (Oration 31), the fame of this shrine spread and by the fourth century a church had been built around the cave. This church, as well as the ruins of the more prominent church, built over it in the fifth century, may still be seen at the site. This church, as its ruins attest, was the largest in the region. Monasteries for both men and women grew up surrounding it which attracted pilgrims from all over the empire.

The fourth-century Spanish pilgrim nun Egeria wrote about visiting this shrine twice, on her way to and from Jerusalem. On her second visit, she writes, "When I had arrived in the name of God, prayer was made at the [saint's] memorial and the whole of the Acts of Saint Thekla had been read, I gave endless thanks to Christ our God, who deigned to fulfill my desires in all things, unworthy and undeserving as I am. Then, after a stay of two days, when I had seen the holy monks and ascetics who were there, both men and women, and when I had prayed and made my Communion, I returned to Tarsus and to my journey."

### Prokimenon

**Reader:** Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

**People:** Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

**Reader:** God is renowned in Judah; in Israel, great is His name.

**People:** Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them; let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

**Reader:** Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them;

**People:** Let all round about Him bring gifts to the awesome Lord.

**Epistle:** 2 Cor. 6:16-18; 7:1

### Alleluia Verses

Come, let us rejoice in the Lord; Let us sing joyfully to God our Savior!

**Verse:** Let us greet His presence with thanksgiving; let us joyfully sing psalms to Him!

**Gospel:** Lk. 5:1-11, First Sunday After the Holy Cross

