February 8

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Severus of Antioch (ca. 459-538) monk and pastor

Today the East Syrian Church commemorates Severus, a monk and patriarch of Antioch who lived in the 6th century. He is also commemorated by the Coptic Church on the 14th of Amsir and the 2nd of Babah.

Severus was a native of Sozopolis in Pisidia, Asia Minor. After studying in Alexandria and Berito (present-day Beirut), he joined a monastery near Gaza, attracted by the radically evangelical lifestyle of the Palestinian monks.
Having been educated in environments faithful to the theology of Cyril of Alexandria and hostile both to Greek philosophy and to the affirmations of the Council of Chalcedon, Severus dedicated much of his life to defending the so-called 'moderate monophysite' positions, on the basis of Scripture and the teaching of the fathers.
After spending time in Constantinople, Severus was consecrated patriarch of Antioch in 512. During the years of his Antiochene pastoral ministry, he communicated to his faithful a profound desire to know Christ and live in communion with God, in homelies that are considered among the most beautiful of the early Church.
He made several attempts to help reconcile the different theological factions into which the Eastern Church was divided, but constant changes in imperial politics forced him to stop.
After a last trip to Constantinople, Severus moved to Egypt. He died in Chois on February 8, 538, aware that he had done everything in his power so that love would have the last word in the Church's life.

A READING

Brothers, tomorrow we will set out for the holy churches in the countryside and the holy monasteries of those who consecrate themselves to the solitary life. For the one who occupies this apostolic see, in every era, is required by law to leave the city and visit the flock of the diocese.
And how do you think I will maintain my strength when I am separated for a short time from communion with you, friends of God? In any case, while I am away, be faithful and assiduous in going to church, and there, lift up your hands and ask God to help you and guide you in every good work. Build yourselves up in faith and bodily purity by making the sign of the Cross on your forehead, and by clothing yourselves with the force of the holy mysteries as with a coat of armor. Because of your abundant mercy towards those in need, you will be worthy of the mercy that comes from above. And we, though far away, will help you by asking those who have left the world and are united with God to make pure prayers rise to heaven for you.

Severus of Antioch, from the *Cathedral Homily*, 55

BIBLICAL READINGS
2 Tim 3:10-4,22; 1 Pet 5:1-14; Acts 20:17-38; Jn 10:1-16

Stephen of Muret (d. 1124) monk

Today the Roman Martyrology commemorates Stephen of Muret, a hermit and witness of evangelical simplicity and radicalism.
We owe all that we know of the first thirty years of his life to his biographer Stephen of Liciac, according to whom Stephen of Muret, a native of Alverne, travelled to southern Italy with his father when he was twelve years old. It was probably during this journey that Stephen met groups of hermits in the Benevento region, and was fascinated by the way they lived.
In 1076 Stephen moved to Ambazac, near Limoges, and began to live alone on the hill of Muret. Other lovers of solitude soon joined him. Within a few years, the woods of Muret were filled with small huts, which were eventually transformed into a traditional monastery. Here Stephen was simply an authentic and faithful witness to the Gospel, offering hospitality daily to pilgrims, travellers, and visitors from all walks of life. In particular, he welcomed the poor, recognizing Christ's visit in them, and sinners, to whom he showed the power of mercy, infinitely stronger than the power of sin.
Stephen died on February 8, 1124. He left no written texts, but his disciples gathered together his oral teachings and wrote a spiritual work and a monastic rule.
After Stephen's death, his companions were forced to leave Muret for Grandmont, where they founded the Grandmont Order. Inspired by Stephen's witness, the Order had an important role in the spiritual renaissance of the twelfth century.

A READING

This was the thought of our father Stephen: "If a sinner comes to us and hears harsh words, he will think that God is harsh, and will attach himself even more firmly to his wrongdoing. But if he receives first what is necessary for the body, he will be more willing to listen to whomever announces the salvation of the soul to him. If it is right to serve such people spiritual goods so that they might be freed from their error, even more should they be given material goods so that they might serve Christ." This is how he spoke to sinners, announcing God's love: "My brother, do not be afraid. The power of your sin cannot triumph over the power of God's forgiveness. Your sins are small at the moment in which you turn to God."

From Stephen of Muret, *Nothing but the Gospel*

BIBLICAL READINGS
Isa 35:1-10; Mt 19:27-30

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Jerome Emiliani (d. 1537; Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (30 tubah/terr):
Sophia, Pistis, Elpis and Agape of Thessaloniki (2nd cent.), martyrs (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Georg Wagner (d. 1527), witness to the point of bloodshed in Austria

MARONITES:
Zachariah (6th-5th cent. BC), prophet

ORTHODOX CHRISTIAN AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Theodore Stratelates (d. 319), megalomartyr
Zachariah, prophet

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
Severus, patriarch of Antioch, crown of the Syrians