

Waiting on the Lord: The Fourth Watch



St. Mary and Archangel Michael Coptic Orthodox Church
Servants Meeting

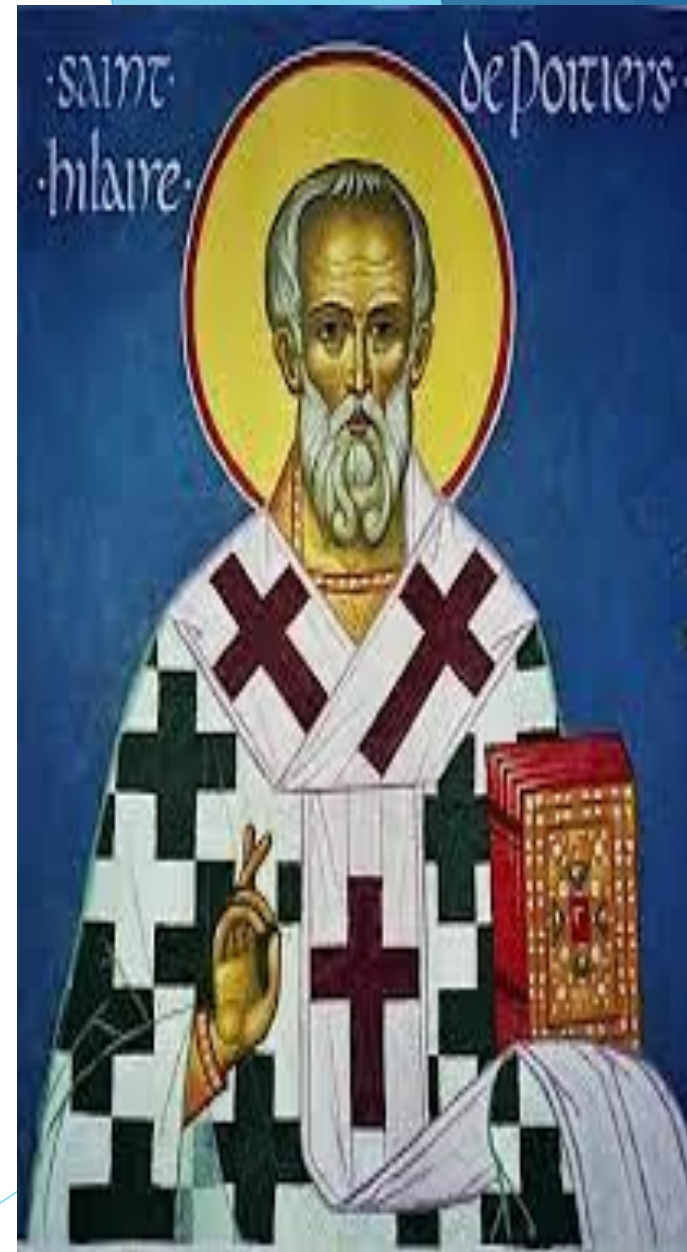
“Immediately Jesus made His disciples get into the boat and go before Him to the other side, while He sent the multitudes away. And when He had sent the multitudes away, He went up on the mountain by Himself to pray. Now when evening came, He was alone there. But the boat was now in the middle of the sea, tossed by the waves, for the wind was contrary. Now **in the fourth watch of the night** Jesus went to them, walking on the sea. And when the disciples saw Him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, “It is a ghost!” And they cried out for fear. But immediately Jesus spoke to them, saying, “**Be of good cheer! It is I; do not be afraid.**” - Matthew 14: 22-27

What is the Fourth Watch?

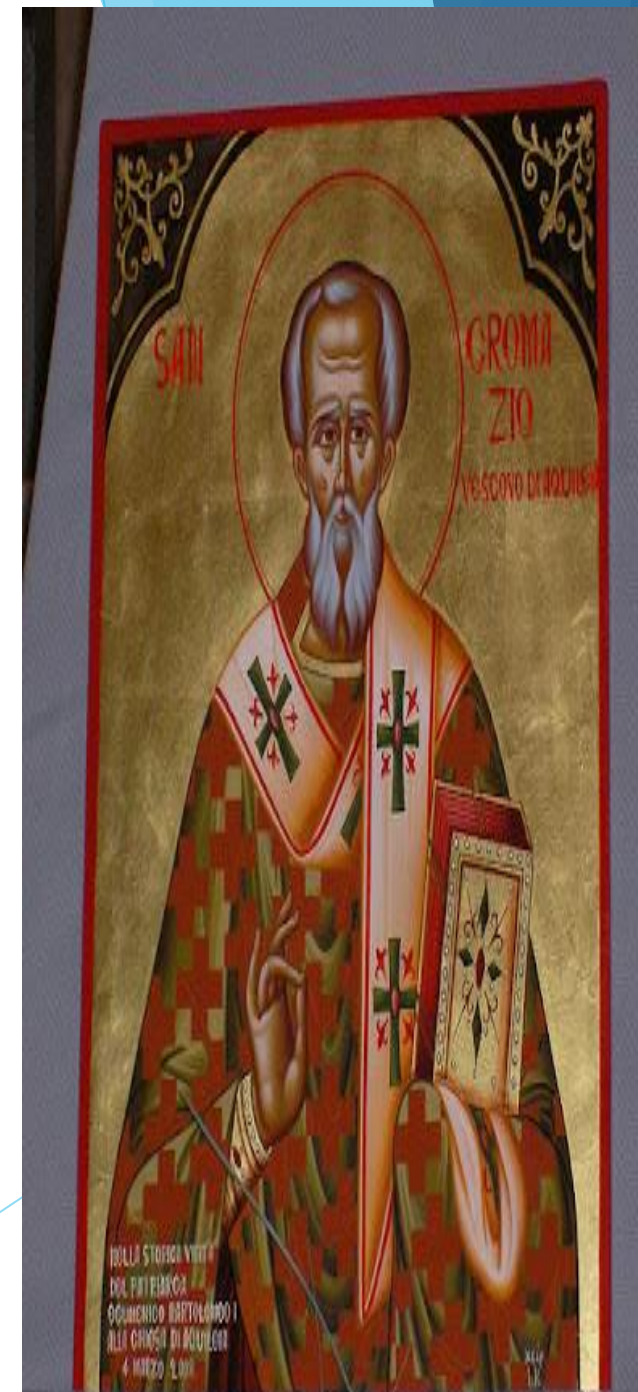
- ▶ 3 AM-6 AM (Roman Time)
- ▶ Period of Deep Sleep and Darkness
- ▶ Period of Unknown
- ▶ Period in which the Sun begins to Rise (Great Darkness prior to the Light)
- ▶ Time in which Monastics Rise for Prayer
- ▶ Time of Darkness, Time of Unknown, Time of Confusion (Time of worry/distress)
- ▶ Typology of the Fourth Watch?



“In the meantime, however, the disciples are harassed by wind and by sea. **Amid all the disturbances of the world, in conflict with the unclean spirit, they are tossed about.** But the Lord comes in the fourth watch. In the fourth watch of the night, **the measure of his concern is found to be just as great.** The first watch was the law, the second the prophets, the third the Lord’s coming in the flesh, and the fourth his return in splendor...He will come to those who are **restless and deeply troubled.** And since, as we may expect from the antichrist, they will be exposed to temptations of every kind, even at the Lord’s coming they will be terrified by the false appearances of things and crawling phantasms with eyes. But the Good Lord will then speak out and dispel their fear, saying, **“It is I”.** **He will dispel the fear of impending shipwreck through their faith in his coming”**- St. Hilary of Poitiers, On Matthew 14.14, ACC



“...The fourth watch marks the time when the Son of God was born in the flesh and suffered, the time he promised his disciples and his church that he would be eternally watchful after his resurrection, saying, “I will be with you even to the consummation of the world.”- Chromatius (Contemporary of Jerome, and Ambrose), Tractate on Matthew 52.5, ACC



The Fourth Watch Reexamined

- ▶ Symbolic of our Lord's Second Coming and Period of Waiting After his Death and Resurrection
- ▶ Agpeya Midnight Prayers: Prayers of Vigilance and Preparation of Second Coming
- ▶ Reason Why Monastics rise at this time, to be watchful and ready, and avoid slumber, waiting on the Lord and his coming
- ▶ What is the fourth watch in our daily lives?
- ▶ Time of restlessness, unknown, chaos, storms of trials and tribulations, Waiting **PATIENTLY** on the Lord



Why did the Lord delay? Why does He delay?

“This is the way he constantly deals with our fears. He does not hesitate to bring on worse things, even more alarming than those before. They were troubled here not only by the storm but also by the distance from the land. Note that he did not too easily remove the darkness. He did not come quickly to their rescue. He was training them, as I said, by the continuance of these fears and instructing **them to be ready to endure**...He was instructing them not too hastily to seek for deliverance from their presenting dangers **but to bear all challenges courageously.**” -St. John Chyrosostom, PG 58:505; NPNF 1 10:310, ACC

End Result? Worship of Christ and Strengthening and Proclamation of Faith: “And those in the boat **worshiped Him, saying, “Truly you are the Son of God”**”- Matthew 14:33



The Fruit of Longsuffering/Patience

- ▶ Galatians 5:22 (Longsuffering); For some God has granted this fruit to be a gift
- ▶ Patience is not passive, rather active. Like any fruit requires cultivation and work. Patience is not simply waiting
- ▶ Patience can be done with evil intent
- ▶ Example: Job, Jacob (also occurred late at night)
- ▶ Active spiritual process accompanied with wisdom and discernment
- ▶ “Patience is the companion of wisdom”-St. Augustine
- ▶ Our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ as the embodiment of Longsuffering
- ▶ The Goal of Patience is to Witness to God’s glory and grace at the Appropriate Time
- ▶ We cannot separate Patience on the Lord and also Patience with our Brethren



Should we always wait patiently?

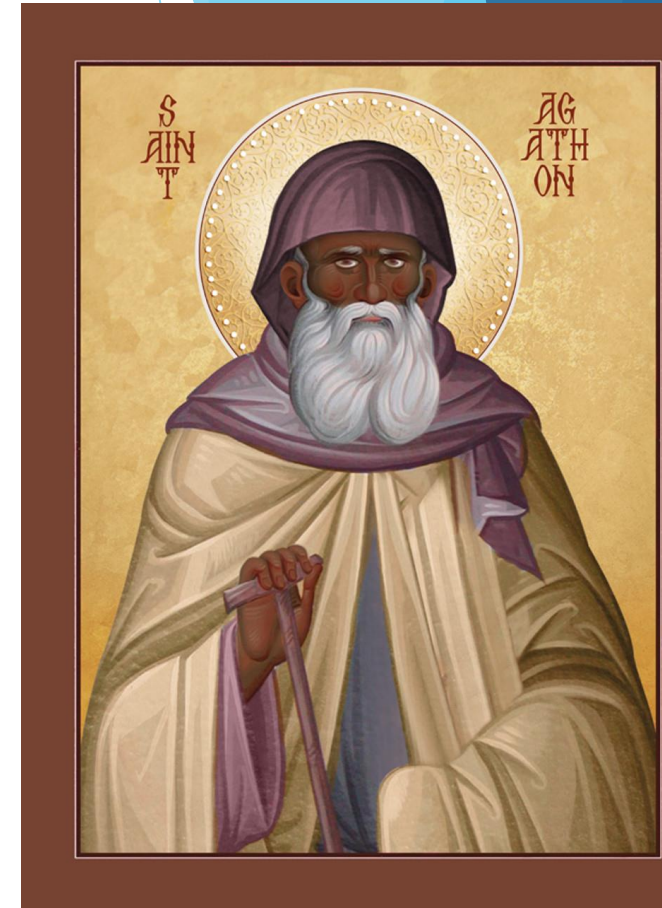
“Once, monks who had heard of his discernment came to Saint Agathon to see if they could make him lose his temper. They asked him, “Are you Abba Agathon, a fornicator and a proud man?” “Yes, that is true,” the monk replied. “Are you the Agathon who is always talking nonsense?” the monks inquired. “I am,” the saint agreed. “Are you Agathon the heretic?” the monks persisted. Saint Agathon said, “I am not a heretic.”

They asked the saint why he agreed with them when they accused him of vices, but then denied this last charge. Agathon replied, “I accepted the first accusations, since that was beneficial for my soul. But heresy is separation from God, and I do not wish to be separated from God.” - Saying of the Desert Fathers

Life of Anthony: **Persecution and Defense Against Heresy**

If love of Christ or love of Church and its dogmas are compromised we should act very swiftly

“Who can separate us from the love of Christ?” - Romans 8:35



Practical Applications

- ▶ Patience with Ourselves (The Spiritual Life is a Marathon not a Sprint)
- ▶ Patience with Others (Family, friends, those in the Service)
- ▶ Patience with God and faith in his timing (Ecclesiastes 3)
- ▶ Begin with building virtue and eliminating passions with regards to **small things first**, so foundation will be cemented to be able to withstand **trials of fourth watch and larger problems**
- ▶ Serving those who are less fortunate than You. Thanksgiving cultivate virtue of waiting on the Lord in difficult circumstances.
- ▶ Understanding the dynamic between God and your Neighbor (Epistles of John)
- ▶ St. Anthony: **“Our life and our death is with our neighbor. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalize our brother, we have sinned against Christ.”**



The Theotokos the Martyr?

“Nobody will hesitate to call her **Martyr**: first she remained under the suspicion of Joseph (he thought, when she was pregnant, that she had been in adultery) until the angel appeared to him and taught him the mystery of generation; then she fled to Egypt because of Herod’s fury; and again when, through the fear of Archelaus, she returned from Egypt and departed to Nazareth, moreover, when she was passing every day with Jewish murderers, and was living a life which was close to death.” - Saint Severus of Antioch



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Patience as a Path to Holiness

“A nun who was at the monastery of St. Nektarios, when St. Nektarios fell asleep and countless of miracles started happening with the Grace of the Holy Spirit and through the prayer and the intercession of St. Nektarios, was thinking and saying: “What did that man, our elder, do? He was not a great ascetic just like the ascetics of the desert. He did not do long fastings, he did not do long all-night vigils, he did not do long prayers. He was not a Martyr, What did he do and reached such great spiritual heights?

St. Nektarios appeared to her and told her: “It is true that I did not do great asceticism like the great ascetics of the Church. Neither did I martyr like the great Martyrs of the Church martyred.

But I was patient!”

And for this great patience, God gave him glory because he was slandered, he was wronged and left everything in the hands of Christ. He did not defend himself, he did not take revenge on anyone.-

Metropolitan Athanasios of Limassol



“Here is the patience of the saints; here are those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus.”

- Revelations 14:12

