April 27

Avvakum (d. 1682) and all martyrs of the Church of Old Believers

On April 14, 1682, the archpriest Avvakum was burned at the stake. He was the first leader of those Russian Christians who came to be known as Old Believers.
In the 17th-century Russian Church, which was shaken by the severe moral decadence of the clergy but driven towards rebirth by the sincere religious desire of its faithful, one attempt at spiritual reform followed another. This provoked conflict, sometimes violent, among the people and within the Church hierarchy. Following the election of the patriarch Nikon, who was condemned by the Moscow Council in 1666, liturgical and disciplinary reforms based on Greek tradition were introduced into the Russian Church, upsetting Christians' daily lives.
Avvakum and his followers organized a forceful resistence to the reforms. Their stubbornness reached the dimensions of religious fanaticism, and they were condemned by the Council of 1666. This created a lasting schism in the Russian Orthodox Church. Today, there are still many followers of the "old faith" in all parts of Russia.
From 1667 until 1971, the year the Holy Synod of Moscow lifted its ban on their practices, the Old Believers experienced repeated, violent acts of persecution at the hands of the public authorities, who were sometimes supported by the Moscow hierarchy. Avvakum wrote an autobiography, a striking document that conveys both the seriousness of intention and the extreme suffering of men and women who, despite the disgrace they endured, became witnesses in history because they were willing to die for what they considered the true Christian faith. For this reason, it is important to remember in prayer all of the Old Believers who were persecuted and killed because of the hatred others showed for their form of religious expression.

Mechitar of Sebaste (1676-1749) monk

On the morning of April 27, 1749, Mechitar (Mxit'ar) of Sebaste, a monk who founded the Armenian congregation of St. Lazarus, died in Venice. He had devoted his entire life to God and to the religious education of his fellow Christians.
Mechitar, baptized Manuk, was born in Sebaste, Armenia in 1676. He entered the local monastery of the Holy Cross at a very young age, wishing to cultivate an intense inner life and pursue his intellectual interests.
In those years Armenia was torn by strife within the Church, caused by the aftermath of the christological controversies of the first millennium. Mechitar decided to study these controversies in depth in order to seek avenues to peace within the Armenian Church and with the Roman Apostolic See. He returned to Sebaste, where he met with Eastern and Western Church leaders and pondered the idea of founding a monastic center where a new generation of Christians, open to dialogue and initiated into the meekness commanded by the Gospel, could be educated by studying tradition.
When the bishop of Erzurum, who was hostile to dialogue with Rome, became Patriarch, Mechitar was forced to flee with his followers. He sought refuge in the Peloponnese, but Ottoman invasions forced him into exile again, and he eventually settled in Venice, on St. Lazarus island. He received a warm welcome in the Venetian lagoon, and the monastic congregation he founded there in 1711 grew rapidly.
Guided by the conviction that no truth can be called truly Christian unless it takes all Christians into account, Mechitar successfully achieved his plan to create a form of monasticism that would further dialogue and promote peace through study and prayer.

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
Christina Rossetti (d. 1894), poet

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Catherine (d. 1478) and *Juliana* (d. 1501) *of the Holy Mount of Varese*, virgins (Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (19 barmudah/miyazya):
Simeon the Armenian (4th cent.), bishop of Persia, martyr (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Origen (d. ca. 254), doctor of the church at Caesarea

MARONITES:
Simeon, brother of the Lord, martyr

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Simeon, relative of the Lord, bishop of Jerusalem and hieromartyr