

Focus on the Faith

The Orthodox Veneration of the Saints

Taken from Dr. George S. Bebis

In the Orthodox Church the worship (*latreia*) given to God is different from the honor (*timi*) of love (*agape*) and respect, or even veneration (*proskynesis*), "paid to all those endowed with some dignity" (St. John Chrysostom, Hom. III, 40). The Orthodox honor the saints to express their love and gratitude to God, who "resteth in the saints." As St. Symeon the New Theologian writes, "God is the teacher of the Prophets, the co-traveler with the Apostles, the power of the Martyrs, the inspiration of the Fathers and Teachers, the perfection of all Saints" (Catechesis, I).

Throughout early Christianity, Christians customarily met in the places where the martyrs had died, to build churches in their honor, venerate their relics and memory, and present their example for imitation by others. Interesting information on this subject comes to us from the early Second Century: the Martyrdom of St. Polycarp (ch. 17-18). According to this very early account the first Christians reverently collected the remains of the saints and honored them as "more valuable than precious stones." They also met on the day of their death to commemorate "their new birthday, the day they entered into their new life, in Heaven." To this day the Orthodox have maintained the liturgical custom of meeting on the day of the saint's death, of building churches honoring their names, and of paying special respect to their relics and icons. The Seventh Ecumenical Council (787 A.D.), in summarizing this practice of the Church, declares that "we adore and respect God our Lord; and those who have been genuine servants of our common Lord we honor and venerate because they have the power to make us friends with God the King of all."

The feast days and the celebrations honoring the saints had become a common practice all over the Christian world by the third century. The twentieth canon of the Council of Gangra in Asia Minor

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(between the years 325 and 381) anathematizes (regards as accursed) those who reject the feast days of the saints. So great was the esteem in which the Apostles, prophets, and martyrs were held in the Church, that many writings appeared, describing their spiritual achievements, love and devotion to God.

Orthopraxis

Orthodox Tradition

By Archpriest Basil Rhodes

"Where the Bishop is, there is the Church..." (St. Ignatius of Antioch)

Q: How do I address an Orthodox Bishop?

A: The first thing in discussing how to address an Orthodox Bishop is to recognize what the Bishop represents.

An Orthodox Bishop is the living icon of Christ, the most perfect celebrant of the Holy Mysteries and is empowered with the authority of Apostolic Succession. While Orthodox Bishops are all equal, within the Orthodox Church, they have different administrative duties, honors and rank. (i.e.: Patriarchs, Metropolitans, Archbishops and Bishops).

So based upon their rank, we should address:

Bishops as "Your Grace,"

Archbishops as "Your Eminence."

Metropolitans as "Your Beatitude"

The proper title for Patriarchs is "Your Holiness."

Q: How do I greet an Orthodox Bishop in person?

A: When we approach an Orthodox Bishop, we seek his blessing: By bowing from the waist such that our right hand touches the floor, than as we raise up we place our right hand over the left hand

with palms upward, we say, "Bless your Grace" or "Bless your Eminence." The Bishop then answers, "May the Lord bless you," and blesses us with the Sign of the Cross by forming his fingers into a Christogram,* and places his right hand in our hands. By this response to our request for a blessing, the Bishop emphasizes that he is blessing us in the Name of Jesus Christ. We then kiss his hand. It should be noted that unlike a priest, the Bishop can bless with both the right and left hands; however he will ordinarily use only his right hand.

The reason that a lay person kisses the hand of a Bishop is because he stands in the place of Jesus Christ. Also we kiss his hand to show respect to his Apostolic office. More importantly, because the Holy Mysteries are held in the hands of the Bishop during the Divine Liturgy, when we kiss his hand, we show respect to the Holy Eucharist.

* Christogram - The Bishop forms his fingers to represent the traditional "ICXC." Which is the first and last letter abbreviation of the Greek words for Jesus Christ: "IHCOYC XPICTOC".

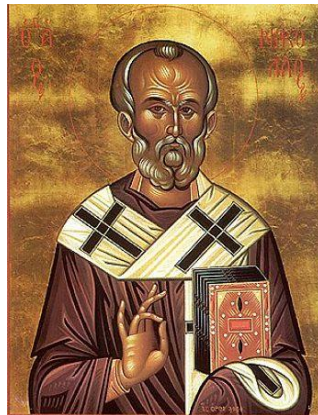
Lives of the Saints

Life of St. Nicholas for Children

St. Nicholas Orthodox Church

Feast Day - May 9

Translation of St. Nicholas' Relics



More than 1,600 years ago, in the year 270 AD, St. Nicholas was born not far from Myra, in a land that is now part of the country of Turkey. In those days Orthodox Christians were persecuted for

their faith. It wasn't easy to be a Christian. Many of them were tortured and executed because they believed in Christ.

Nicholas was taught by his parents to love the Lord with his whole mind, heart, soul, and with all his strength. When they died he inherited their money. He used this to help the poor, the hungry, and the sick. Whenever he helped anyone he did it secretly, so that only God would know, He did not want praise from people; he wanted his reward to be only in Heaven.

After he gave away the money his parents had left him he decided to become a monk. He went to a monastery where he lived and worked and prayed, intending to spend the rest of his life repenting of his sins. But soon it became clear that God wanted him to be a priest, and so he began to study the Law of God.

St. Nicholas became the parish priest of a village church after his ordination. He worked very hard, instructing his flock and helping those in need. He also performed all the Divine Services and was a spiritual father to all.

One day the Archbishop of Myra died. The other bishops, as well as the priests and people of the town, gathered to choose a successor. They couldn't decide who should be their new archbishop. They kept a vigil and prayed all night long in the cathedral, begging God to guide them. God revealed to one of the bishops that the first priest to enter the church in the morning should be chosen as the new archbishop. At sunrise, a simple priest, Father Nicholas, came quietly into the cathedral to say his morning prayers. In this way the Lord God revealed His choice for archbishop.

A Church Council

In the year 325 a great Council of the Orthodox Church was held in the city of Nicea. Three hundred seventeen bishops from all over the world came. At this Council part of the Creed we sing in every Divine Liturgy was written down and St. Nicholas had a wonderful opportunity to defend the teachings of the Church against Arius

who denied that Jesus Christ was God in the flesh and was leading many people astray by his false teaching.

St. Nicholas followed the words of our Lord, *'Lay up treasure for yourself in Heaven'*, by saying his prayers every day, by fasting, and by performing many good deeds. God was so pleased that He worked many miracles through St Nicholas. Because he was able to calm storms on the sea he became known as the patron saint of sailors. Because he protected children (he even raised 3 children from the dead!), he is also a patron of young people. He was able to multiply food, just as our Savior did with the fish and loaves, and in this way he once kept a whole city from starving. People began to call him a "wonderworker" (a person who works wonders or performs miracles). They were so inspired by his life of service to others that many of them, too, began to lead holy lives, filled with good deeds.

After a long life, God called his servant St. Nicholas home to heaven on December 6, 343. He was buried in his cathedral, but in the year 1087 the remains of his holy body (relics) were taken to Italy to save them from the Turks who were persecuting Christians and destroying churches and holy objects, and they remain to this day in the city of Bari. The Orthodox Church celebrates this transfer or "translation" of his relics on May 9th. St. Nicholas led a life so pleasing to God, that God glorified His saint even after his death, As a sign of God's grace, a fragrant substance called "myrrh" comes from the relics of St. Nicholas and many sick people anoint themselves with it and receive healing. There is an Orthodox church in Bari whose priest frequently celebrates services before the relics, asking St. Nicholas to pray for us before the throne of God.

People all over the world know and love St. Nicholas. For instance, he is the patron of Russia. Children in America, Germany, Holland, and many other countries know about him. Unfortunately very few know that he was a Bishop of the Orthodox Church. Many American children don't know that Santa Claus is St. Nicholas

(Santa comes from the Latin for "saint"; Claus is a nickname for "Nicholas"). They know mostly about his gift giving to children; they don't realize that he was so generous because he loved Christ more than anything else and wanted to serve Him by helping others.

Orthodox children are fortunate to know the whole story of St. Nicholas, and not just one small part of it. We should try to tell our non-Orthodox friends and neighbors the truth about "Santa Claus" so that they too, can realize how important and wonderful it is to follow Christ!

The Origin of the Christmas Stocking:

One old man was so poor that he decided to send his three beautiful daughters into the streets to make a living. Finding out about this, St. Nicholas came secretly at night and threw some gold coins tied in a stocking through the window. In the morning they found the money and gave thanks to God for saving them from misfortune.

(Taken from Orthodox America with permission)

Matushka's Corner

Ascension – May 28

By Matushka Joanna Rhodes

The next Great Feast following Pascha in the Pascha Tide season, is that of Ascension. After Our Savior's stay on earth, after His Resurrection, He ascended into Heaven on the fortieth day. This day is known as the Feast of the Ascension. It is customary on this day to say (much like we say Christ is Risen! – Indeed He is Risen), Christ has Ascended! - the response being; From Earth to Heaven!

In Britain and other countries in the west, it is customary from Sunday prior to Ascension through Ascension Day to have prayers offered for God's blessings on the land, livestock and crops, for a good harvest. Also, in Britain this Feast is associated with water festivals and in Derbyshire, there is the popular practice of Well

Dressing. Wells are dressed with a large framed panels decorated elaborate mosaic like pictures of flower petals, seeds, grasses, leaves, tree bark, berries, and moss. They are very beautiful and delicate, and very labor intensive to make. Customary for the Portuguese is to make bouquets of olive branches, wheat, poppies and daises. Olive and wheat symbolize the desire for a plentiful harvest. The poppy is representative of peace and the daisy for money. A small amount of wheat is kept in the house to signify prosperity throughout the coming year. Other medicinal plants and herbs are gathered also, to be used for home remedies. In Germany on Ascension Day there is great out-door festival people go on picnics and have open-air parties. In certain areas, there is the traditional drinking of "Ascension beer" in celebration of the Feast. The Armenians gather grape leaves from the first spring leaves, from the vine (they are the most tender), which are made into dolmas for the Feast Day. The vine is representative of Christ.

Hope you all have a wonderful and Blessed Ascension Day.

Upcoming Events

Christening – May 2

Nika and Tom Wynn's granddaughter and Lydia Narkevich's great granddaughter will be christened on May 2, 2009 at St Nicholas.

Parish Feast Day - May 8 and 9

Our Parish Feast Vigil will be held on Friday, May 8 and our Feast day on Saturday, May 9. Bishop Benjamin will be the celebrant. Matushka Joanie is leading the Special Hospitality Committee to arrange refreshments and decorations of the Church for the Friday evening vigil and Saturday Feast day. Please contact her to offer help cooking, setting up the hall and cleaning up. Donations of money to help pay for the food are also welcome.

Hospitality

There are upcoming lunches that do not yet have volunteers. Please sign up to host a lunch.

Rummage Sale – Date Changed to May 30

This church fundraiser will be organized by Brooks Szolyga and Nika Wynn. Brooks is on the medically challenged list right now so any assistance with this sale would be greatly appreciated. We're hoping raise \$1500 (or more!) for St Nicholas. Please look through your belonging and donate your new and gently used items to donate when the time comes. We will not be selling men's and women's clothing but we do need children's clothing.

Picnic in Mid August

We plan to have the annual picnic at Wildwood Park. The date is tentatively August 23.

Church Festival - Oct 3 and 4

We need everyone's help to plan food, entertainment, advertising, volunteer and general project management.