



St Xenia

Memory celebrated May 3

One of the sweetest saints in all Orthodoxy remained for seventeen centuries in comparative oblivion unknown, unhonoured, and unsung -- until she chose, at the bidding of God, to reveal herself to a humble priest, in the bustling City of New York.

The name of this Greek girl, who had been sainted but ignored for altogether too many centuries, was Xenia; and the name of the devout Christian to whom she made herself known was the pious Father George Nasis, the highly respected priest of the Greek Archdiocese Annunciation Church in New York City.

Why Xenia remained screened from Greek Orthodoxy for so long a time is attributed to the will of God, the same will that selected a comparatively obscure twentieth-century priest as the herald of the unacknowledged saint. The amazing disclosure would have been more plausible had some archaeologist unearthed St. Xenia's earthly remains, but that was not the choice of the Lord whose acts often puzzle the will of man, but whose truth is borne out in one way or another. The comparative simplicity of the occurrence merely dramatises the way of heaven and the truth of Jesus Christ.

In yet another incredible incident, Father Nasis acquired laurels which he never wished for and which he thereafter chose to minimise rather than exploit. In one of his customary periods of meditation and prayer there appeared before him a very lovely girl who announced herself as Xenia, a martyred saint of the Church. Not only did she reveal herself for the first time in 1700 years, but she bade the good priest to paint her likeness, asking that in the icon her hands appear clasping a Cross.

At First Father Nasis kept the incident to himself, lest he be ridiculed; but finally he could contain himself no longer. He told his superiors about the appearance of St. Xenia with such conviction that scholars went in search of her in ancient manuscripts, even going back to the oldest of calendars in a vain effort to find the name Xenia mentioned. The credibility of the priest was on the wane when at long last St. Xenia was found in an ecclesiastical work entitled "O Megas Synaxaristes," comprising twelve volumes of the history of the saints of Orthodoxy by the scholar and monk, Victor Mattheou. In such a massive work Xenia was not easily found, but in the end Father Nasis was vindicated.

Mattheou's work describes Xenia as having long, golden-blond hair, blue eyes (as witnessed by Father Nasis), and beautiful features. Moreover, when she was born in 291 AD, to parents named Nicholas and Despina, in the town of Kalamata, Greece, it was determined that she be raised in the faith of Jesus Christ. At maturity her depth of faith outshone her physical beauty, and she was looked upon with great admiration by the Christian community.

The roving eye of Magistrate Domitianos of Kalamata happened to fall on the lovely Xenia who stirred within him more than admiration. It was love at first sight and he soon offered a proposal of marriage. This proposal was rejected, however, because Domitianos had refused to accept Christ and clung to ancient idolatry with a tenacity which Xenia saw as folly and superstition. It was decided that a prison would change her mind. All else having failed, she was jailed on

spurious charges with the stipulation that she could be released if she changed her mind.

When months of incarceration and abuse failed to move Xenia, she was put to death. Soon after, she was sainted because of the many miracles attributed to her, and was given a feast day on May 3rd. This date somehow failed to appear on the Greek Orthodox calendar, although it is a matter of record as indicated by the research of the monk Mattheou.

The icon of St. Xenia still adorns the Annunciation Church and has for forty years been the site of miracles, and miracles in this twentieth century have been hard to come by. Father Nasis, who never sought public acclaim and managed to remain his humble self throughout, was a priest of the Annunciation Church for more than thirty years, passing on in 1974. His many writings, and supplications in honour of St. Xenia give testimony to his faith. His discovery remains in his beloved church, and many a gaze will be fixed upon the sweet St. Xenia who was cloaked in anonymity for seventeen centuries, but whose memory will now be honoured for as long as there is Greek Orthodoxy.

from **Orthodox Saints**, v. 2, by Fr George Poulos,
Holy Cross Orthodox Press

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



St Theodore of Sykeon (613AD)

Commemorated May 5

St. Theodore of Sykeon was monk and bishop of Anastasiopolis in Galatia. From infancy he was so given to prayer that as a schoolboy he often deprived himself of food to spend time in church. At an early age he shut himself up, first in his mother's cellar and then in a cave under a disused chapel. The desire for isolation led him subsequently to live in a cave in a nearby mountain. He later assumed the monastic habit when on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, and received ordination to the priesthood from his bishop. His life was extremely austere, living on vegetables, but of these he partook most sparingly, and wore an iron girdle about his body. He was endowed with the gifts of prophesy and of miracles including those of healing. He was consecrated bishop of Anastasiopolis, but after ten years succeeded in obtaining leave to live as a monk. At this time he was invited by the emperor and the patriarch to visit Constantinople where he miraculously cured the emperor's son of elephantiasis. He returned to Sykeon where he died on May 5, 613.

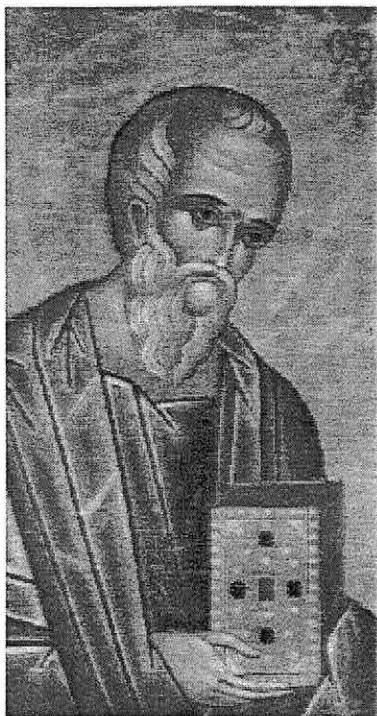
[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St John the Evangelist

Commemorated May 8



The "Divine Dozen" who served Jesus Christ as his apostles comprised a band of spiritual giants whose comparison to one another invites scarcely more than an embarrassment. But the sentimental favourite seems to be St. John the Evangelist and Theologian, the apostle who looked into the dying eyes of our crucified Lord on that dark day at Calvary and received the Messiah's last request. An agonised John heard the final words from the Cross, entrusting to him the care of the Mother of God, the Virgin Mary, who was uppermost in the thoughts of her Son in his last moments of earthly life (John 19.26).

Born in Bethesda of Galilee, the son of Zebedee, John shared his apostolic mission with his brother the Apostle James, who died for Christ in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Salome, but he is affectionately referred to as having three mothers, the other two being Mary the Mother of Jesus and the symbolic Thunder (Boanerges). The latter applied to him by the Saviour, as the son of Thunder, because he was rebuked for asking Christ to send down "fire from Heaven to punish the citizens of Samaria that refused to admit him because he was going to Jerusalem" (Luke 9.58-56). He

was in close personal contact with Jesus to the end, despite his extensive travels as an evangelist. A dedicated apostle, John was chosen by Jesus Christ to accompany Him on the ascent of Mt. Tabor, the scene of the historic Transfiguration, and where Jesus was proclaimed by God to be "his beloved Son." The personal ties with Jesus and his Mother were shared by Salome, John's mother, whose love for the Saviour earned her a place among the saints and whose feast day is celebrated on August 8, as one of the seven myrrh-bearing women who anointed the sacred body of Christ, after his descent from the Cross.

John remained close to the Mother of the Saviour throughout her lifetime and was at her side when she breathed her last on August 15, officiating at her burial in the Garden of Gethsemane, a spot made sacred by her Son years before. He was among the other disciples who discovered the empty tomb of Mary, who forty days after her death had been assumed into Heaven.

With his promise to Jesus for his Mother's care fulfilled, St. John now turned his full attention to carrying the message of Jesus Christ to the spiritually darkened areas of the then known world, preaching throughout Asia Minor with a passion that won converts who formed a solid base for the New Faith. Unlike the other eleven apostles, all of whom were martyred in the name of Jesus Christ, John lived to the ripe age of 105, escaping the fate of his brother evangelists.

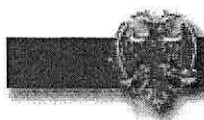
This remarkable durability provided for one of the longest services on record in the cause of Christ, a service which carried over into the second century which establishes him as a record holder in conversions to Christianity. Some estimates have it that he was personally responsible for winning over some 400,000 pagans to Christianity, a staggering figure considering that his audiences could never have been at best a few hundred and most of the time a lot less. Not even his uncle, St. Prochoros, who wrote about his nephew's travels, could have envisioned such a

protracted mission for the Messiah.

John withdrew from the gruelling pace of preaching in favour of the solitude of the beautiful island of Patmos in the Aegean Sea. There he refreshed his mind and body and found the tranquility in which it became possible to write that part of the holy Scriptures known as the Revelation, a profound and prophetic book of the New Testament. This holy work was done at the express bidding of God, who smote a huge cleft in a rock formation of a cave, still visible today, and commanded John to write this revealing segment of the Bible. On the spot where lightning struck the cave the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople maintains to this day a sacred shrine which has beckoned countless religious pilgrims to the island of Patmos.

After leaving Patmos, John turned up at Ephesos, where, in the course of writing the three epistles contained in the New Testament, he is said to have caused, through means of a prayer vigil, the destruction of a pagan temple dedicated to Artemis which is now the site of a beautiful cathedral. A true man of God, John is one of the most beloved figures of Christianity.

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Glykeria

Memory celebrated May 13

by Fr George Poulos

The Roman Empire extended its authority over the entire Mediterranean world in the second century. It was administered by men who looked down at the general public, but who looked up to statues of their many idols. The early Christians, who were forced to worship in secret, must have felt mixed emotions of piety and disdain for the high officials who humbled themselves before useless forms carved out of granite or stone.

One sweet Christian soul who challenged the mighty at the expense of her life was a girl called Glykeria, whose very name translates to "sweetness" and who exhibited a purity of heart not usually put on display by others, equally as devout but much more cautious in expressing their true feelings.

Glykeria was not a face in the crowd who summoned the courage to step forward, as one might suppose. Surprisingly enough she was the daughter of a Roman official of senatorial rank and, therefore, an aristocrat who rubbed elbows with those in power. In her circle of friends there was not the slightest suspicion that this well-placed daughter of Roman society was actually a Christian convert who loved the Messiah with all her heart and who slipped off unnoticed when it came time to mingle with her real friends to worship Jesus Christ.

Out of respect for her parents, St. Glykeria kept her devout Christianity a well-guarded secret, even at times when her presence was required for festivities involving the false gods. It was a matter of time, however, as to how long she could maintain this dual personality without revealing herself, or take the safer course in escaping the loathsome idolatry to find a haven among Christians.

Her love for her parents and respect for their wishes finally placed her in an uncompromising position when she dutifully accompanied them to a pagan ceremony but was compelled to look away in agony, no longer able to abide an unholy scene that was driving her to distraction and torturing her Christian conscience. The scene was a high pagan holiday being observed in her home city of Trajanopolis on the Adriatic Coast. It was being held in the largest temple of the area, and at the special invitation of a man called Sabinius who was the province prefect.

It was hardly the setting for a Christian girl to assert herself, but when her anguish had been noted, her father asked if she were ill, to which she replied that she was indeed ill, sickened by the sight of supposedly noble Romans prostrating themselves before bits of stone. Stripping herself of the cloak of hypocrisy she had been forced to wear, Glykeria approached the feared Sabinius who was leading the ceremony of prostration and asked him in a scornful tone:

"Why does the noble Prefect prostrate himself before a slab of cold marble which has no power nor a saving grace to benefit anyone?"

Thinking her either demented or drunk, the Prefect gestured for her to leave him to his ministrations. Undaunted, Glykeria stepped in front of the idol, and with arms outstretched she

proclaimed the omnipotence of God and prayed in the name of Jesus Christ that his power be shown to these misguided Romans. While the stunned pagans looked on in disbelief, she repeated her prayer, and at that instant the earth trembled with such violence that the statue of Zeus toppled onto the quaking temple floor to be shattered to bits.

The only calm person in this thoroughly confused crowd was Glykeria who cried out,

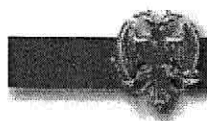
"Is this the hope of all Romans? Let it be known that the hope for Romans and all mankind is Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, who for our salvation was crucified on the cross in Jerusalem and whose blood shall redeem us all. Our strength is in him, not in this pile of rubble."

When Sabinus recovered from the shock, his pagan-trained mind prevailing over what could have saved his soul, he screamed that the daughter of a Roman senator had turned into a sorceress and had defiled the ancient pagan beliefs. He lost no time in having her executed.

St. Glykeria gave her life for Christ on 18 May 177 AD at the age of twenty-one. From her burial site emanated a sweet aroma, indicating her saintliness which has been honored by emperors such as Maurice in 591 and Heraklios in 610 AD.

from **Orthodox Saints**, v. 2, Holy Cross Orthodox Press

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Pachomios the Great

Memory celebrated 15 May

Among the least known yet most venerated of our many saints was Pachomios, whose obscure life was such that his distance from man placed him closer to God, and yet he served both. Pachomios was one of the first monastics and the founder of communal monasticism.

Monasticism is not only one of the most sincere expressions of piety, but it is also one of the sturdiest pillars of the Christian faith. Monasticism is directed toward the attainment of the highest spiritual peace and serenity through prayer and meditation. The monastic thereby strives to attain likeness to God, in whose image all men are created. Those who look upon monastics as mere recluses seeking to avoid the harsh realities of life would do well to remember that without the strength of spirit and mind that the monasteries have provided, the light of Christianity would have been considerably dimmed, if not extinguished altogether.

Some of our greatest Christian stalwarts have been drawn from the monastic ranks. Their dedication to knowledge, wisdom, and faith in their eternal search for truth have been like those of the unheralded scientists whose microscopes have revealed the secrets that have helped mankind. The monk has often been the answer to both the apostate and the heretic.

The saint we honour for his endeavours in this much maligned but forceful and viable segment of Christianity is Pachomios. He was born during the reign of Constantine and was a soldier in the Byzantine army. Raised by pagan parents, he thoroughly enjoyed the military life with its pomp and splendour, but soon he discovered that he could perform greater service. He was not insensitive to his growing need for spiritual enlightenment and in an about-face he walked away from a life of conquest and riotous living, turning to one of earnest meditation and prayer. Bidding his parents farewell, he left the urban comforts of his native country, exchanging them for the barren wastes of the desert of Tavennisis in Egypt, to which he confidently strode for an unheralded approach to God.

His seeming estrangement from society developed into a greater intimacy with God, and after many years in retreat his reputation as a man of God was spread throughout the empire. People were fascinated by the stories they eagerly would hear about Pachomios, the hermit, monk, intellectual, philosopher, and humble servant of God.

Within a decade, a total of twelve monasteries had been established in the desert by Pachomios. These monasteries were populated by those who followed him into the oppressive wasteland in search of God. The rules of monasticism laid down by him are still followed today. Such was his conception of the monastic approach to God that no one has ever sought to change it. Although St. Pachomios would have preferred a complete isolation that he might give himself over totally to Jesus Christ, he fully realised that monasteries strategically located would lead to greater and more dedicated population of Christians who would see to more churches, since not all of Christianity could be wrapped up in tidy packages of humanity in cloisters. His full dedication to Jesus Christ did not bind him to the fact that the family unit was the nucleus of Christianity, but to supplement the work of priests there had to be the watchdogs who sat as silent watchdogs but who were always on the alert to warn of danger. These, then, were the monks, who, in spite of isolation were a driving force of Orthodoxy. They not only sat in on council sessions of

importance, but some left their retreats to be ordained and rise in the hierarchy. St. Pachomios chose to stay with the cloister but his tremendous spirit went out into the land and we know him now as St. Pachomios the Great.

Many miracles came to be attributed to Pachomios; he attracted thousands who trekked mile after mile to be in his presence, to hear his counsel, and to receive his blessing. As a result, he was given the title of "Great" by the Fathers of the Church. Unlike the martyrs, Pachomios came to a peaceful end in his beloved desert on 15 May 395 AD.

from "Orthodox Saints" v. 2
by Fr George Poulos, Holy Cross Orthodox Press

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Translation of St Nicholas' Relics

Celebrated May 20

St. Nicholas the Wonderworker was the bishop of Myra in the 4th century is the most universally venerated saints, although his life is virtually unknown. His see of Myra is in Lycia, south-western Turkey and called Mugla. When Myra and its shrine were taken by the Moslems, the relics were translated to Bari in 1087, where there were many Greek immigrants.

St. Nicholas was reputed to have given three bags of gold to three girls for their marriage dowries in order to save them from prostitution. He is also said to have raised three boys to life after they were murdered in a brine-tub by a butcher, and in his saving three unjustly condemned men from death and three sailors near the coast of Turkey.

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



Sts Constantine and Helene

Commemorated May 21

Adapted from the Late Very Rev Nikon D Patrinacos



Flavius Valerius Constantinus, the son of the emperor Constantius Chlorus and Helena, was probably born in Naissus, Serbia, on 27 February in 272 or 273 AD. Soon after his father's death in Britain on 25 June 306, Constantine was raised to the purple by the army and the Praetorian Guard.

It was not until 312, after defeating his brother-in-law and rival Maxentius at the Milvinian Bridge, that Constantine became the senior ruler of the Roman Empire. It was at this battle that Constantine adopted his famous battle banner (Labarum) as the champion and sign of Christianity. As it is related, Constantine found himself at a decisive crossroads, not only of his own career but also of the future of the

Roman Empire. He had defeated Maxentius, but the outcome of the impending confrontation was very much in doubt. While deeply concerned about his ability to defeat Maxentius, Constantine, on the evening of 27 October 312, had a vision of a cross in the sky outside of the city of Rome. On the four sides of the cross he saw written the Greek words "EN-TOU-TW-NI-KA" (BY THIS YOU SHALL WIN). Constantine immediately ordered a battle standard of the design and words he had seen in the sky and placed it as the head of his army as he began to march against Maxentius. Maxentius' army was annihilated and he himself was drowned in the Tiber river. Shortly afterwards, the Christian faith not only was tolerated in the Empire but accorded imperial favour. In 313, Constantine and his other brother-in-law and rival Licinius met at Milan and agreed to legally recognise the Christian Church and to tolerate all religions equally without any interference from the state. This decision has come to be known as the Edict of Milan. In 314, 316, and 324, he repeatedly defeated his last remaining rival Licinius. Once he had overcome him, he was the undisputed ruler of the Roman Empire.

Constantine's policy from the beginning was to bring the Christian Church into close relationship to the point of identification between Church and State. This resulted in his being concerned with the internal affairs of the Church even though he was not a baptised Christian himself and never became such until shortly before his death. Divergent teachings within the Church had appeared very early. Some of them became heresies and began to seriously disturb the Church. In 313, the Donatist schismatics in Africa appealed to Constantine to adjudicate their controversy with the Church of that province. At their request, Constantine referred the case first to a commission of bishops and then to a Synod (Arles 314). When the controversy continued, Constantine decided to hear the case himself in 316. In all trials the verdict was against the Donatists. In answer, they attacked not only their ecclesiastical authorities but also the imperial government encouraged riots and raids. Constantine found himself obliged to apply his verdict with repressive measures. This Donatist controversy is the first instance in which the internal affairs of the Christian Church were brought before an Emperor to be adjudicated. This opened the way for a de facto identification between Church and State and granted the head of the state the right not only to intervene in the internal affairs of the Church, but to issue as well binding decisions. It is from this point on that in terms of reality the Orthodox Church became a state religion with all advantages and disadvantages that a marriage of this kind has yielded to her through the ages.

A few years later and in answer to another and more serious controversy within the Church, the Arian dispute about the Person of Christ, Constantine convened the 1st Ecumenical Council of Nicaea in Bithynia during June, 325. The emperor himself presided over this very important Universal Council of the Christian Church although he himself was still not baptised Christian. As it is known, this Council resulted in the complete victory for Orthodoxy and in the statement of most of the articles of the Creed which we today and is known as the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed. The Nicaean Council also established a special, privileged, status for the Bishop of Jerusalem. At the same time, Constantine uncovered the site of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Jesus in Jerusalem, and built on it the Church of the Holy Sepulcher.

The Nicene Council was the most profound event of Constantine's reign because it set a precedent for future Councils. When either the Roman Catholic or Eastern Orthodox Churches have major dogmatic or disciplinary problems to resolve, they would convene an Ecumenical Council to settle them.

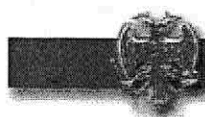
Constantine gradually broke away from the old traditions of Rome and after his victory at Chrysopolis in Asia Minor against Licinius (324), he became sole Emperor and immediately moved his capital from Rome to Byzantium which he rebuilt, gave it his name. Constantine had the city officially dedicated on 11 May. The city was only an imperial residence until 359 when it became the official capital of the empire.

All through his reign he went to great pains to bring peace within the Church and between pagans and Christians. It is difficult to state at which time he decided to embrace Christianity, but his attitude towards the Christian religion was consistently one, not only of believing but of rearing a deep and lasting respect for it. The fact that he was baptised just before his death does not prove that he was not a practicing Christian before that, but rather points to the practice at the time of deferring baptism because of fear of sinning after it and thus proving unable to be saved - as a current teaching was wrongly advocated. In 321, he decreed that Sunday be observed as a public holiday. He liberally endowed church buildings, especially at Holy Places in Palestine, such as the Church of Resurrection which his mother Helena had erected.

The centralisation of the Empire at Constantinople as the locus of power, and Constantine's preference for Christianity opened the way for an increasing control of the Eastern Church by the Emperor of Byzantium. In contrast, the Church in the West and its heading bishop, the Bishop of Rome, was allowed by circumstance to carry on his ecclesiastical leadership unhindered by State influence and intervention. Thus, the Bishop of Rome became the more prominent figure, lay or ecclesiastical, in the west. It is from the 4th century that the Papacy began to assume its ever increasing secular importance and the monocratic position it reached in the Middle Ages.

Constantine tempered the criminal law and the laws on debts, improved the conditions of slavery, and provided for poor children; as a result exposing unwanted babies was lessened. He freed celibates and unmarried persons from special taxation, introduced laws against sexual licentiousness, and exempted Christian clergy from military service. Constantine died on 22 May 337 near Nicomedia on his way east to fight the Persians. For his services to the Christian Church, Constantine has been named the 13th Apostle by the Orthodox Church and is venerated as a saint together with his mother Helena. The feast day of Sts. Constantine and Helena is celebrated on May 21st.

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)



GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St. John (Ivan) the Russian

By His Grace Bishop Joseph of Arianzos

On the 27th of May we celebrate the memory of a newly-revealed Saint, of Russian background, whose holy remains are found to be - seemingly against human logic - incorrupt and whole, close to 270 years after his bodily death, at the town of New Prokopi (formerly Emin Agha) in Evia Greece. We are referring to the Venerable John (Ivan) the Russian, the New Confessor.

Among the soldiers of the Russian Tsar Peter the so-called Great, who fought against the Turks in 1711 in that unfortunate war for the Russians during which Peter himself almost got killed, was also a young handsome lad called Ivan. Ivan was about 20 years of age who came from the region known as Little Russia.

An innocent and simple peasant boy, he had been brought up with orthodox piety, the piety that transformed a vast and untamed barbaric land and made it "**Holy Russia**".

It seems that apart from Church books and texts Ivan was not educated. He knew, though, very well how to distinguish between good and evil, between temporary and eternal, and between that which was according to God and according to the world. He knew that the meaning, taste and beauty of life is Jesus Christ. He also knew that by being with Him (Christ) and close to Him you are blessed and fortunate, regardless of any thing that may befall you in this life, whatever the magnitude and size of temptations that may come upon you! Therefore from a young age he had cast his anchor to God and lived according to His holy will; humbly, quietly, without hollow egotism and affinity to the worldly and vain things. His breathing consisted of "**Gospode Iisouse Christe, Sinye Bogou, pomiloui mne**" (i.e. "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God have mercy on me"). His greatest joy was the Divine Liturgy, and his enjoyment was to practice never ending prostrations and veneration before the icon of the most sweet "Bogoroditsa", the Theotokos (Mother of God). For pleasure he had fasting, asceticism, and hardship. His hope and goal was the "Tsarstvo" of heaven, the Kingdom of God!

However, God does not put aside a "flower strewn life" on earth for His elect. On the contrary, in the world He promises them sadness, distress, hardship and temptations, because narrow is the gate that leads to Life and upward and difficult is the way which leads to salvation. The Christian life is not one of ease and comfort and enjoyment, but a cross! Likewise for the pious Ivan he kept a cross.

In the Russo-Turkish war to which we have already referred to, the Tatars who fought with the Turks took Ivan prisoner and sold him as a slave to a Turkish official from Prokopi in Asia Minor. How can anyone describe the life of slavery? Can one describe the humiliation, the insults, the put downs, the reproaches, the beatings and tyranny? If one also takes into account that Prokopi was the camp of the Genitsari who were "double the sons of hell" even of the Turks, then can one understand the tortures of the Christian lad!

If that wasn't enough, he had also the extreme pressure put on him to change his faith, to confess the "*salavat*", to have the "*sounet*" performed on him, thus turning him into a Muslim! Pressures, at times gentle and at times violent! Sometimes with promises and sometimes with threats! You see, Satan has many ways and methods up his sleeve. However, they had fallen on a "hard nut",

so to speak, or rather onto a hard rock that had become harder because of its constant contact with the Precious Stone, the Cornerstone, which is Jesus Christ! Therefore his reply was always, both to the promises and to the threats, a firm "**niet**" i.e. no!

"Your promises do not move me. Whatever you promise is worthless, since listening to you I will be separated from Christ. Your threats do not frighten me. Whatever you threaten me with, I ignore with the grace of my Lord! For me is 'to live in Christ and to die is gain'. Nothing can separate me from the love of the Son of the Virgin!"

And to his Turkish master he said, "**If you leave me free to practice my religion, I will be most eager to your directives. But if you force me to change faith, be aware that I give you my head with great joy but not my Faith! I was born a Christian, and death will find me a Christian!**"

God, seeing the unbending faith of his servant and his fearless confession, softened the hard heart of Ivan's master and slowly he started to respect and like the young slave. Ivan's piety had a lot to do with this as well. The master saw him as a conscientious worker (he was a stable hand) performing every task with great humility. He practised endless fasting and prayer. He attended church whenever it was possible for him and to partake of Holy Communion every Saturday. He did not lift his eyes to look at anyone but was always shy and reserved. He was eager for any kind of honest work. He slept in a corner of the stables on the hay, though he was offered a room of his own. He stayed up for all-night vigils constantly praying on his knees, sometimes in the stables, as if it was the stable of Bethlehem, and at other times in the church of St. George, near the estate of his master! He rushed to help everyone with love in his heart and never had a bad word for anyone! He forgave immediately and sought forgiveness even if he was not to blame! He looked after the animals in the stable with great care and followed his mounted master on foot with dignity, the signs of virtue permanently drawn on his cheeks and his lips constantly moving to the never ending Jesus Prayer: "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me"...

All this sounds strange to the ears of those who look at things in a secular worldly way, but all this was the **result of slavery!** The young Ivan was free within his slavery. Free from all kinds of ties with passions and sin. He was **internally free, in his soul, in the depths of his heart**, because freedom is not something of the body but principally a matter of the inner man! You could be free in the body, but a prisoner of corruption, of sin! You could also be a slave like Ivan but inside feel the fullness of the freedom that the presence of Christ grants. In this way the young Russian obeyed his master "in the Lord" (Eph. 6: 5-8 and Col. 3: 22-24), rendering "Caesar's things to Caesar", and refused obedience on the subject of faith, rendering "God's things to God" (Acts 5:29).

We can therefore say that Ivan's position and his coping with slavery is for us a **proposal for life in freedom**. Ivan's example shows us the manner in which a human being becomes and is truly free.

We, who as subordinates and employees, protest and grumble at every order given us by our superiors. We constantly wait for the time we will become masters so as to take revenge on others who become our subordinates. We who occasionally obey something and consider it a humiliation; we who as children consider our parent's advice as "oppression"; we who have been spoken of as "the neck of a Greek does not carry a yoke"; and we who within the depths of our soul have the remains of a four hundred year slavery, a more recent triple occupation and a few dictatorships to boot, have **much to learn from Ivan's stance and the manner in which he confronted slavery**.

The Saint was not a fatalist. He did not say, "slaughter me Agha that I may become a saint". He

knew what was happening to him, and he also knew the reality of things. He knew that it was up to him if he wanted to be enslaved or to remain free. If he gave up his soul and became a Muslim the Turks would let him free. They would give him plenty of "bakshish", wealth, money, honour, and glory! However, he also knew that he would then be a true slave! Slave of self-love, love of life and of egotism! If he refused to give his soul, even if he physically remained a slave (as it came to be) or even lost his life, he would be free (as he was). The obedience which he practised to the various tasks set to him and the obedience to the will of his master (of course that which did not conflict with Christ and His holy will), was in essence, according to the aforementioned presuppositions, an act of **freedom**! Moreover, it was a voluntary offering, and a sacrifice of his own will (such as that practised by monks, who give up their will to their Geronda (spiritual Elder), and obey him in the Holy Spirit).

The diligence, in which he carried out the various tasks assigned to him, was based on the surety that he was doing the work of Christ. He had accepted slavery as a service given to him by Christ himself. Therefore he kept to the letter, St. Paul's word:

"Slaves obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching, but as Slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free" (Eph. 6:5-8 NLT).

Truly the way he approached this, was as though the sweat he poured out for his master was as sweat poured out on behalf of Christ. The work of his slavery was seen as work done on behalf of the Gospel!

In this way, all this brought abundant divine Grace on this servant of God, and the young slave received the charisma of working miracles!

His master and other Turks, seeing the miracles worked by Christ through Ivan, started to treat him with much respect and honour and asked him to accept his own separate quarters equipped with all amenities. He politely declined and continued to live in his stable until the day he gave up his soul to the Freedom- and Life-giver Christ on the 27th May 1730 at the approximate age of forty years. This was soon after receiving the All-holy Mysteries.

Ivan was first buried at the humble little church of St. George, near the estate of his master, where he usually went to pray throughout the night. From there, in 1845, the Christians translated his relics, which had remained incorrupt, to the large church of St. Basil that had been built during that time. He remained there until 1924, working miracles on both Christians and Turks. At the exchange of populations in 1924, the people of Prokopi, forced to move to mainland Greece, brought his relics - such a precious treasure - with them to Evia where they settled at Emin Agha, which was renamed New Prokopi.

At the initiative of the late and of blessed memory Bishop of the region, Gregory the Metropolitan of Chalkida, the piety of the people built a grand and beautiful church in memory and honour of the sweet smelling rose of "Holy Russia". There at last rest his Holy Relics that are venerated by thousands of people throughout the year and produce streams of miracles and healing of all kinds "to those who approach with faith".

The Venerable Ivan shows a special love for children through the many miracles bestowed upon them by Christ. With visible intervention, many times he saved children from certain death during earthquakes when roofs fell on to children during school hours at Prokopi and in Athens at the

Holy Umercenaries (Aghi Anargyri) some years ago. He also saved countless children from terrible diseases and other calamities.

Even his help and benefaction to adults is not limited! Whole streams of miracles have been bestowed upon them as well! Deaf and dumb are able to hear and speak! Paralysed are able to walk in good health! Blind see again! Cardiopathics return to their former strength! Cancer sufferers are healed! A certain woman from Cyprus bent over due to a spinal problem so that her head reached her knees, like the one in the Gospel, was healed a few years ago immediately she donned the belt of the Saint. This miracle was made known widely by the Press. A non-believer physician (who at one time, with great disrespect, had called the relics of the Saint a "mummy"), was healed from an incurable and terminal illness when the humble Saint appeared to him and said, "I am he whom you called the 'mummy', and I heal you by the Grace of my Lord Jesus Christ"! Demoniacs are freed from the demons that possess them! Saddened people are comforted! Disillusioned people find hope! Weakened people are supported! Disbelievers become believers! Pious people are strengthened in their piety! The name of God is constantly glorified because of the small-framed slave boy from Russia. This was the suffering stable-hand who **lived as a slave without slavery, voluntarily poor, unimportant, dressed in ragged clothing, obedient, but firm though in his holy Orthodox Christian Faith**, having the "Slava tebie Bozhie" (Glory to you God) constantly coming from his mouth!

God is glorified, and he also abundantly glorifies his creation, who love in gloriousness and humility. God glorifies his genuine child, who "through the words of his lips stayed firm on tough paths" (Psalm 16(17):4). God glorifies His Confessor who was not embarrassed or afraid to confess Him "before all people" and now God confesses him before all people, before the Angels and Archangels, all the Saints and the Bogoroditsa (Theotokos), before all creation visible and invisible!

[Return to homepage \(framed\)](#) | [Return to homepage \(no frames\)](#) | [Return to home page](#)