

GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St Kalliope the Martyr

Commemorated June 8

The unsung heroines of early Christianity, who suffered agonising death rather than disavow Jesus Christ, were anything but members of a weaker sex when they endured the atrocities and pain inflicted by persecutors of Christians with the same quiet courage of the bravest of men. Some of them were born with the fatal gift of beauty. They knew nothing but loving care in their lifetimes and were hardly equipped or prepared to suffer the cruelties of the enemies of Christ, nor were they inured to hardship and deprivation of their male counterparts that might have given them a body chemistry to better withstand physical abuse. They were not theologians, nor clergy of any manner, whose minds had been honed to a peak of devotion to the Saviour not only by study, meditation and prayer but by actual association with oppression and suffering and were, therefore, mentally prepared for the worst. They were for the most part sweet, innocent girls whose lifestyles were aimed at motherhood and not the endurance of horror and torture. Theirs had to be the greater courage, therefore, and no man would dispute it.

One of the genuine heroines of third-century Christianity was a quite lovely girl with the pretty name of Kalliope who lived in the reign of the vicious Emperor Decius, an extremely callous and pompous monarch who took delight in barbarous acts, chief among which was the persecution of Christians for whom he had a hatred born of fear of their Lord. It is generally conceded that Nero was mad and that Decius was madder still; even though they were separated by two centuries they were two of a kind, the kind usually looked upon as the scourge of God. Had she been born in the twentieth century Kalliope may have been a candidate in a beauty contest, but in the third century her beauty indirectly made her a candidate for sainthood -- a contest she won at the expense of her life.

When Kalliope reached the age of twenty-one she had already passed the age at which most women of that day married, but it was not for lack of suitors, which she had in great numbers. Her days were filled with activity, social and religious, and twenty-one years had come and gone seemingly unnoticed. When at last she seemed ready for marriage, a host of suitors clamoured for her hand. Among the would-be husbands was a pagan who would not take no for an answer. He sent word that were she to reject him in favour of another, especially a Christian, he would see to it that the pagan authorities called her before them for their well-known brand of justice. Kalliope did not hesitate to not only deny this suitor, but made it plain that she would not marry him even if he were a Christian, a conversion which would have been highly unlikely as well as useless.

The threat to her life was carried out and through the use of false rumour and accusation she was brought to trial before the magistrate. She stood accused of a variety of crimes against the state, ranging from a mockery of the pagan faith to treason against the state, all of which was attested to by a parade of well-paid false witnesses, none of whom had ever seen the girl. The rejected suitor stepped forth to offer a withdrawal of the charges against her if she would disavow Christ and become his pagan bride. The alternative was torture, and if that didn't bend her will, then it was death in a manner to be devised.

If Kalliope had any fear or was the least bit hesitant, she did not show it, but instead she declared that the only mockery in this affair was the trial itself, and she furthermore asserted her faith in Jesus Christ. That was enough to seal her fate and she was led off to prison, a far cry from the comfort of her home with her loving parents. The deadly game had begun and the gentle Christian

girl had to know the helplessness which leads to terror and which in turn weakens the will, but she gave no indication that she would change her mind. She was then put to the cruellest of tortures. Taken to a public square, she was bound to a post and mercilessly flogged until her clothing and flesh were in tatters. Her beautiful face was scarred with branding irons and salt was poured into her open wounds, and while the breath of life was still within her she was told to disavow Christ. When this gallant girl refused she was put to death. In 1957 AD a special synod allowed a liturgical service to be written by John Ramphos honouring St. Kalliope the Martyr, whose feast day is observed on June 8.

St. Kalliope pray for us who lack your Faith, courage and strength.

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Saturday, the day of souls

by Archbishop Stylianos

From the early times, our Church dedicated Saturday to the souls. It is primarily the day of those who have fallen asleep. And Christians always took care, with memorial services and charitable acts done especially on Saturdays, to stay close to their dead and ask God for their repose and salvation. Even today one will see more people in graves on Saturdays than on any other day.

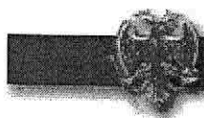
But why is Saturday the day of the souls? There are many explanations. The most likely explanation why Saturday was set apart for the departed appears to be that the word "Saturday" - coming from the Hebrew word Sabbath - means rest. And on this day we are praying for the repose of the souls.

Starting from this point of view, it is worth our expressing a few thoughts so that we of today may remember again great truths concerning the Saturday of the Souls. Properly speaking, there are only two Saturdays of the Souls, the one on Saturday before Meat-fare Sunday and the other on Saturday before Pentecost. Yet Saturday generally as the day for those basic and saving truths:

1. That the world does not end in whatever we see and count, but also extends in the space of the spirit, which also exists, coexists together with us. In this place the souls of our departed beloved are encamped.
2. That the Church is a continuous intercommunion between those of its members that are still struggling on earth and those that have already slept in the Lord.
3. That amidst the fever of action and the struggle of daily life we must remember that the natural terminus of every effort, which is rest in the Lord, since there is nothing more certain than death and nothing more uncertain than the hour of death.

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Miraculous icon of Axion Esti

Commemorated June 11

by Fr G. Poulos



Within discussions of Orthodoxy, the Holy Mountain of Mt. Athos does get mentioned many times. Mt. Athos itself is what we call a "Spiritual Republic". It is an independent state which pledges allegiance only to Almighty God. Mt. Athos which is perched on a peninsula 20 miles long and seven miles wide is off the Macedonian Coast. The monasteries there are among the oldest in Christendom. Monks, hermits and holy men have lived there since the third century.

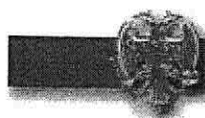
During the Byzantine Era, the total population exceeded 50,000. No women have ever been allowed on Mt. Athos. The Blessed Ever-Virgin Mary, the Mother of God, is the "Patron Saint" of the Spiritual Republic of Mt. Athos. In one of the magnificent monasteries there is a huge icon on the Blessed Virgin Mary which has been titled "Axion Esti", meaning **'it is worthy to bless Thee, the Virgin'**. This beautiful icon was painted in the seventh century and has since graced the sacred walls of the Cathedral of Mt. Athos.

Today we commemorate the anniversary of the miracle which took place in front of this icon over 1,000 years ago, on June 11. During the celebration of the Divine Liturgy every Sunday, we hear the beautiful, and inspiring hymn called "Axion Esti" which follows the prayer (as we kneel) called the "Epiklesis". This hymn was written originally in the year 720 AD by St. Cosmas, one of the greatest hymnographers of the Christian Church. The hymn, however, began with the words "Thee that art more honourable than the Cherubim (Tin Timioteran)". It was well over one hundred years later that this hymn was added to the Divine Liturgy, but with an added beginning as the result of the following miraculous event:

On June 11, 980 AD, as a group of monks were conducting an all-night vigil before the icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, they suddenly noticed a monk standing on the right of the icon whom they did not recognise at all. He was unknown to the monks, and no one could explain his abrupt presence. This unidentified monk began to chant the beautiful hymn written by St. Cosmas, but rather began with the words "Axion Esti os Alethos Makarizin Se Tin Theotokon", which means "It is very meet to bless Thee, Theotokos the ever blessed and most pure Virgin and Mother of God". The monk then explained to the others that he was the Archangel Gabriel and that these words should be added to the hymn. The Archangel then vanished from their sight, leaving the monks amazed at the power of God. Since that day on June 11, 980 AD, the additional words to the hymn of St. Cosmas have been sung by all Orthodox Christians around the world. The icon of the Blessed Mother Axion Esti is still venerated today in the Cathedral of Mt. Athos.

"It is meet indeed to bless Thee, the ever-blessed and most pure and Mother of our God. Thee that art more honourable than the Cherubim, and incomparably more glorious than the Seraphim, who without spot of sin didst bear God the Word; Thee, verily the Mother of God, we magnify".

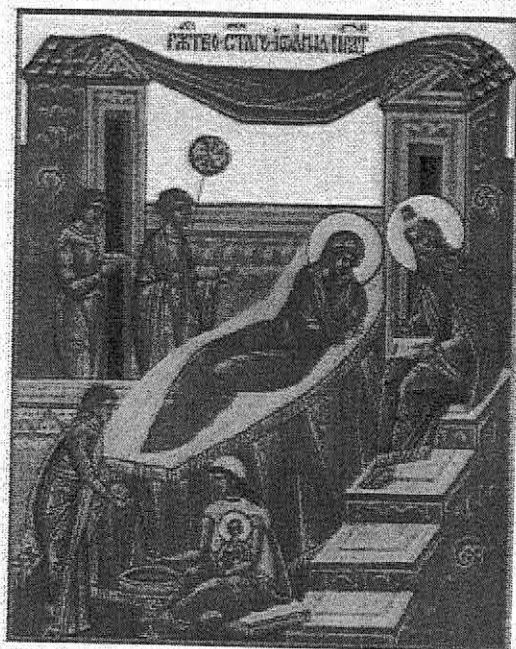
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

The Nativity of the Honourable Forerunner, St John the Baptist

Memory celebrated June 24



**Behold I send my messenger before your face,
Who will prepare Your way before You. The
voice of one crying in the wilderness, 'Prepare
the way of the Lord; Make His paths straight'.**

St John's is the only saint's birthday celebrated throughout the church calendar year. St. John is remembered on three other days as well, but they all deal with the discovery of his Holy relics.

His father, Zacharias, a Hebrew priest, was struck dumb by the Archangel Gabriel at the altar when he would not believe the archangel's news that his wife Elizabeth (a very old woman) would conceive a son. He got his voice back when writing, on the day of the child's circumcision, that his name would be John. When Herod sent soldiers to kill the infants in Jerusalem in search of Jesus, St. John also was at risk. Elizabeth hid the baby, and in anger Herod had Zacharias killed near the temple.

Elizabeth hid in a cave with the baby and died when he was forty days old. St. John remained in the wilderness where he was raised by angels. The presence of St. John and his disciples was not felt until about one year before the beginning of the ministry of Jesus. He preached repentance in the wilderness and not the cities, and the crowds came to him. He is known as the Baptist and Forerunner of Christ, because of his role in preparing the people for the coming of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Apostles Peter and Paul



Celebrated June 29



St Peter

A visiting dignitary is honoured with a symbolic key to the city as a token of respect, but for eternity the keys to the kingdom of Heaven have been placed by the Messiah himself, out of respect to one of his greatest disciples, into the hand of a man called Peter, the constant companion and beloved friend of Jesus Christ. This magnificent disciple, whom trust places at the gates of heaven to examine the credentials of those who would enter, had a master key in his lifetime which unlocked the hearts of men to admit the Saviour, and his wisdom was the key to men's minds which in turn admitted the intelligence to give meaning to the Christian faith.

Brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew, a fisherman like himself, Peter forthwith acknowledged the Master and undertook a lifetime of casting his fisherman's nets for the sake of Jesus Christ and so excelled himself in his personal and total dedication

to the Saviour that in the two thousand years that have elapsed any roll call of the disciples finds the name of Peter among the most prominent. He ranks with St. Paul as one without whom the new Faith could not have survived the whips and scorns of the pagan era of superstition and spiritual darkness.

Several accounts are given in the New Testament about St. Peter and his strong bond with the Nazarene, but the stirring passage in Matthew should be etched in the mind of every Christian, that which says "And I say to thee that thou art Peter and upon this rock I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will give thee the keys of the Kingdom of the Heavens, and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in the heavens, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in the heavens." This divine authority vested in Peter as well as to all of the disciples of Christ, placed a sacred trust in Peter, whose name means, "rock" from the Greek word **petra**.

It was upon this rock of faith, as depicted in holy Scripture, that the formation of the Christian Church, the disciples' handywork, was not only a success but a triumph as well. Peter, the redoubtable fisherman who had never strayed far from his home in Capernaum on the shores of Galilee, was at the side of Jesus in his ministry throughout the Holy Land and as one of his closest apostles planned the campaigns for the winning of converts.

In the course of this spiritual campaign, he came to witness the many miracles of the Master, such as the walking on water, the miracle of the loaves and fishes and, many others which were to lend an aura of divine authority to all of the apostles in the stewardship of the Church.

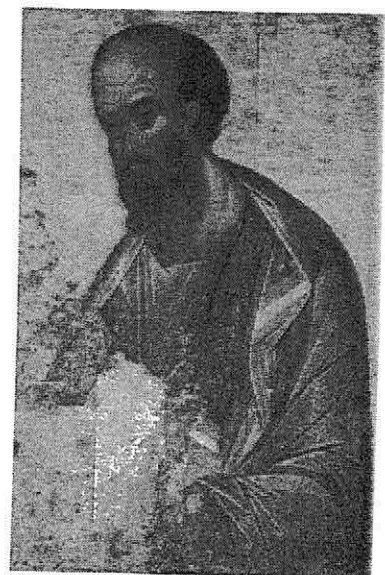
Peter, together with many others, was privileged to witness the glorious resurrection of Christ, an event which all Christendom views with such reverence as to regard the first followers of Christ, as next to divine.

Peter struck out on his own in the missionary work of renewed dedication after the death of Jesus, but he favoured Jerusalem and together with other followers of Christ assisted diligently in the formation of the Christian community in Jerusalem.

Peter, whose presence at Gethsemane had further fuelled the fires of Christian zeal in his heart, joined John in Samaria, Lydda, Joppa, and Caesaria in a propagation of the truth of the Messiah, but returning to Jerusalem found that a famine had set in and that the Christian community was somehow being blamed for the economic woes that ravaged the land. With the help of Paul and Barnabas they restored the confidence of the people and led them out of their hapless state to an era of new prosperity. Ultimately Peter established the first church in the ancient city of Antioch and became its first bishop. Later in Rome, he was sentenced by Nero to be crucified, a manner of death in which he emulated the Messiah.

St Paul

Whenever the storms of controversy within the Christian Church have cast a shadow on the Cross of Jesus Christ, the clouds have been rolled back by the spiritual brightness, undiminished by the centuries, of the magnificent St. Paul. Most Christians agree that were it not for St. Paul, the new faith of Jesus Christ would have never taken hold to become the mainstay of Western civilization. The total commitment of St. Paul to the Messiah, for which he ultimately sacrificed his life, brought the message of Jesus to the nucleus of Christians over a period of thirty years and assured the permanency of the truth of the Savior. It was Christ, of course, who planted the seeds, but it was St. Paul who nourished the garden of Christendom.



St. Paul was born in Tarsus, a flourishing crossroads city in Cilicia,

Asia Minor. He received his religious training in Jerusalem under the renowned rabbinical tutor Gamaliel, from whom he absorbed the teaching of the Pharisees with intensity and sincerity. He deplored the acceptance of the Messiah as heresy to his religion and as an affront to the Law of the ancient covenant. Armed with articles of condemnation from his council, he set out for Damascus with an avowed purpose of wiping out this new belief in Jesus Christ.

On the road to Damascus he met Jesus. This is perhaps the most dramatic turnabout in history, one that was destined to alter the course of the world. St. Paul embraced as the Messiah the man whom he had set out to destroy; thereafter he devoted himself with deep conviction to the truth of Christianity. The conversion alone of this profoundly religious man is in itself testimony to the reality of the Messiah's divinity.

Although not one of the twelve disciples of Christ, Paul linked himself with the apostles and became the greatest apostolic missionary of all time. A brilliant orator and writer, he was sensitive to the needs and moods of the various tribes of both Greek and Near Eastern backgrounds. Furthermore, he was intelligent enough to cope with the problems that beset the new faith at every turn.

St. Paul, a man of small physical stature, cast a giant shadow upon the missionary scene as he traveled the length and breadth of the ancient Eastern world. He had success following success in the vast areas of Asia, Greece, Cyprus, Macedonia, and eventually Rome, where his most noble purpose was to prove his undoing. He had a fondness for Jerusalem, for whose poor he continually solicited funds. Moreover, he envisioned a union of the Jewish and Christian communities, a project which was to prove dangerous. He met James in Jerusalem and together they sought a means to bring this laudable plan into being. However, he encountered not love but outright hostility. In fact, he had to be saved from an angry mob by the Roman authorities, who placed him aboard a ship bound for Rome, where he arrived after a tossed voyage.

St. Paul had always wanted to use the eternal city with its strategic position in the empire, from which the spread of Christianity could be projected. Although he preached in Rome for two years, his ambitions were never completely realized, except for the production of his masterful Pastoral Letters.

Despite his frail health he continued his work for Christ at an accelerated pace, but his enthusiastic love for the Savior also brought him the resentment of certain influential elements in Rome. When his enemies had done their worst, he was brought to trial and met a martyr's death about A.D. 67.

The true greatness of Paul is discerned in his writings, particularly his epistles. As author of almost half of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, he has influenced Christianity as no other man with the exception of Jesus himself. Even after nearly two thousand years, St. Paul's candor, freshness, clarity, and perceptiveness in his writings are as welcome as sunrise.

Orthodox Christianity remembers St. Paul each year on 29th June and as one of the Apostles on June 30.

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