



Holy Martyr Boniface was a slave of a rich young Roman woman named Aglaida and he dwelt with her in sinful cohabitation. But they both felt the sting of conscience and wanted to be cleansed of their sin. And the Lord granted them their desire: the sins of the one would be washed away by his blood, the other was to be purified by her tears and asceticism.

Aglaida learned that whoever keeps relics of the holy martyrs in the home and venerates them receives great help in gaining salvation. She sent Boniface to go to where Christians were martyred to bring back the relics of a martyr. As he was leaving, Boniface laughed and asked, “My lady, if I do not find any relics, and if I myself suffer for Christ, will you accept my body with reverence?” Aglaida scolded him, saying that he was setting off on a sacred mission, but he was not taking it seriously.

Arriving at Tarsus in Cilicia (*modern day south-central Turkey*), Boniface left his companions at the inn and proceeded to the city square, where Christians were being tortured. Struck by the beastly horrible torments, and seeing the faces of the holy martyrs radiant with the grace of the Lord, Boniface marveled at their courage. He embraced them and kissed their feet, asking them to pray that he might be found worthy to suffer with them.

The judge asked Boniface who he was. He replied, “I am a Christian”. Then he was stripped and hung upside down, he was beaten so hard that the flesh fell from his body, exposing the bone. They stuck needles under his nails, and finally they poured molten tin down his throat, but by the power of the Lord he remained unharmed. The people who witnessed this miracle shouted, “Great is the God of the Christians!” Then they began to throw stones at the judge.

The following morning, when things had quieted down, the judge directed that the holy martyr be thrown into a cauldron of boiling tar. An angel came down from Heaven and bedewed him as he stepped into the cauldron. The tar overflowed the cauldron, splattering and burning the torturers themselves. St Boniface was then sentenced to beheading by the sword. Beholding such a miracle, about 550 men believed in Christ.

St Boniface’s companions, waiting for two days at the inn for him in vain, began searching for him, thinking that he had gotten drunk somewhere. After a while, they came across a man who had been

an eyewitness to the martyr's death. The man led them to the place where the decapitated body lay. St Boniface's companions tearfully begged his forgiveness for their unseemly thoughts about him and they brought his relics to Rome. On the eve of their arrival an angel appeared to Aglaida in her sleep and told her to prepare herself to receive her former slave, now the brother and fellow-servant of the angels. Aglaida summoned the clergy and received the holy relics with great reverence. Then she built a church to house the relics, glorified by numerous miracles. After distributing all her wealth to the poor, she withdrew to a monastery, where she spent fifteen years in repentance, then fell asleep in the Lord. She was buried beside St Boniface.

We pray to St Boniface for deliverance from drunkenness.

Sunday, January 1

Twenty-ninth Sunday after Pentecost

Divine Liturgy 9:30 A.M.

Commemoration of Holy Martyr Boniface (†290)
Venerable Ilia of Murom, of the Kiev Caves (†1188)

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Friday, January 6

Moleben for Blessing of Water 9:00 A.M.

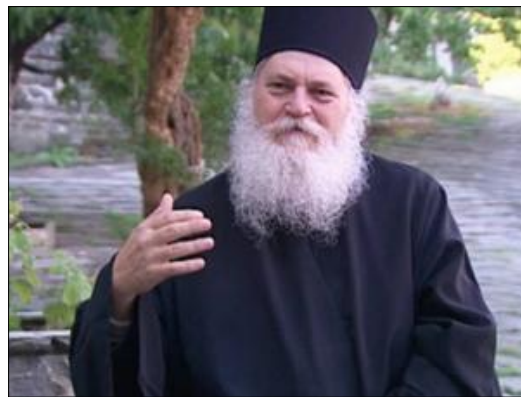
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Sunday, January 8

Thirtieth Sunday after Pentecost

Divine Liturgy 9:30 A.M.

Abbot Ephraim of the Vatopedi Monastery is Imprisoned



On Tuesday, the abbot of the Vatopedi monastery on Mount Athos in Greece, Father Ephraim was arrested.

In the late hours of Tuesday, 10 police officers appeared on Mount Athos. It was rather strange to see policemen in a place where no strangers can be usually met except for pilgrims – the more so because the monasteries on Mount Athos have a special status which makes them to a large extent independent from the Greek government.

Father Ephraim was arrested and taken to a police office in Athens, as if he was not a respectable abbot but a gang boss.

The monks of the Vatopedi monastery prayed for Father Ephraim to be released, but the authorities seem to be ignoring their entreaties.

On Wednesday morning, Ephraim was conveyed to the most secure prison in Athens.

The abbot is accused of financial embezzlement and fraudulent realty deals. The deals involved exchanging less valuable land for higher-value land which belonged to the state. But, later, the Greek authorities decided that the bargain was unequal – and are now claiming that, as a result, the state has lost at least € 100,000,000.

33 people, including several former Greek ministers, are believed to have been involved in this case – but for some reason, Father Ephraim was the only person who has been arrested. Greece, troubled so much during the ongoing financial crisis, seems to have become a favorite toy in the hands of the liberally-minded EU heavy-weights and their ideological tutors across the Atlantic.

The Russian Orthodox Church, the world's most powerful Orthodox Church, has already appealed to the Greek government with a request to release the abbot. Metropolitan Hilarion of Volokolamsk says: "The arrest of Father Ephraim raises many questions. There must be some dubious political game behind this story. The Russian Church believes that Father Ephraim's imprisonment is unfair and inhumane, and will try its best to persuade the Greek authorities to release him – or, at least, put him under house arrest."

Recently, the abbot of the Vatopedi monastery paid a visit to Russia. He led a delegation of Greek clergymen who brought one of the most venerated Christian relics, the Belt which once belonged to the Mother of God, to Russia. The Belt was offered for veneration in a number of Russian cities, and millions of believers came to venerate it.

This was the first time the relic left the Vatopedi monastery since it became its property. Several European countries and the US have asked Greece to bring the relic there, but instead it was brought to Russia.

"Somebody probably wants Father Ephraim to pay for his sympathies to Russia," Sergei Rudov, the head of the Russian charitable fund called "The Society of Friends of the Vatopedi Monastery", says.

"There could be two reasons behind Abbot Ephraim's arrest," Mr. Rudov says. "One is that the EU has now been insisting for a long time that the Athos monasteries should be stripped of their special status and subordinated to the Greek government to a greater extent, because the EU is unhappy about the fact that currently one needs a special visas to be able to visit the monasteries on Mount Athos. The second reason is that some people in Europe are unhappy about the growing Russian influence in Greece – mainly because of the close ties between the Greek and the Russian Churches."

However, yet another theory could be put forward – the Greek government is trying to put pressure upon the Church in an attempt to make it help the Greek state financially – something which Greece, as a country most affected by the financial crisis in Europe, badly needs.

Last year, when the Greek government decided to increase taxes on the Church, the latter

responded with a decisive “no”. The example of Vatican, which does help the Italian government with money, has not made the hierarchs of the Greek Church change their minds.

An expert in church affairs Igor Gaslov, who writes mainly for the website called “Orthodoxy and the World”, says: “When the economic crisis broke out, monks from Mount Athos transferred the largest part of their assets to an offshore zone in Cyprus. The Greek government took this step as an attempt to evade taxes.”

The Russian St. Andrew Foundation, which organized the coming of the Belt of the Theotokos to Russia, has sent its representative to Greece. The representative is already in Athens, and is trying, together with Father Ephraim’s lawyers, to find ways of helping him.

Earlier, St. Andrew Foundation tried to put up a bail for Father Ephraim in an attempt to have him released. But the Greek authorities still remain unbending.

Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and all Russia has sent a message to Greek President Karolos Papoulias to express his concern regarding the custody of Archimandrite Ephraim, superior of the Mount Athos Vatopedi Monastery. “It is my duty to convey our common concern to the chief of the Greek state and to request the release from custody of Archimandrite Ephraim, superior of the Mount Athos Vatopedi Monastery. I do not question the powers of the Greek law enforcement officials and express hope for a fair and impartial decision regarding the property of the Vatopedi Monastery. However, I am perplexed by the custody of the monk, who is not a danger to society and has repeatedly expressed readiness to cooperate with detectives, prior to the court hearing of the case merits,” he said. Patriarch Kirill said he was particularly concerned about Archimandrite Ephraim’s ill health, which was ignored in taking him into custody. “In Russia, Belarus, Ukraine, Moldova and other countries, whose peoples are the traditional flock of the Russian Orthodox Church, millions of believers are alarmed by the police measures taken as regards the igumen of the famous Athos monastery well-known to the entire Orthodox world on the days Orthodox Greece celebrates Christmas,” he said.



Protestors in Athens demand release of Abbot Ephraim

Meanwhile numerous protests take place throughout Greece and in front of Greek embassies worldwide.

..... News From All The Ends Of The Earth

New York, NY: Christianity is the world's largest religion, so says a new Pew Forum Survey called "Global Christianity." According to the survey, about half of all the world's Christians are Catholics, with Protestants accounting for 37%, and Orthodox Christians 12%. The Pew Forum reports about one-third of the world's people, that is, 2.2 billion, are Christians, which makes them the largest religious group on Earth. The Washington Post says the survey showed that Brazil has as many Roman Catholics as Italy, Nigeria twice as many Protestants as Germany. The United States is home to more than 247 million Christians out of 311 million living in the US. The regions with the smallest Christian population are where the Faith began in ancient times, the Middle East and North Africa, — this is due to the continuous Muslim terror. In this region, Christians are only about 4% of the population. Egypt has the largest Christian population in the Middle East with about 4.3 million Christians, mostly of the Coptic Church. Islam is the second largest religion in the world. There are about 1.6 billion Muslims, about a quarter of the world's population. The survey says Sub-Saharan Africa has posted the fastest rate of growth of Christian population in the past century. The population of Christians on the continent increased from 9 million in 1910 to 516 million at the beginning of the 21st century. This amounts to about a quarter of the world's Christians. Nigeria, Democratic Republic of Congo and Ethiopia have the largest Christian populations on the continent (*with Ethiopia's traditional Orthodox population dating to the apostolic times*). China, for the first time, appeared on the list of countries with the highest number of Christians. The study found that China has more practicing Christians than any country in Europe.

Belgrade, Serbia: Hashim Thaci, the Muslim prime minister of self-proclaimed and NATO-sponsored republic of Kosovo, wished all Catholics "a happy Easter" rather than "a merry Christmas". In his festive statement, which was distributed by his office, he said that Easter is the most important holiday in the Catholic world. He went on to congratulate the official Vatican and all Catholics on the occasion of the resurrection of Christ, rather than His birth. The prime minister went on to say that he hoped the Easter festivities would bring the Kosovan Catholics 'more warmth, hope and success' as well as 'progress in society, harmony and peace'. When officials in the prime minister's office noticed the error a second statement appeared on Thaci's official website, offering glad tidings over the festive period.

Annapolis, MD: Prosecutors in Maryland have lodged murder charges against two abortionists. Drs. Steven Chase Brigham and Nicola Irene Riley face multiple charges in connection with late-term abortions allegedly performed illegally at Brigham's clinic in Elkton, Maryland. Authorities report that Brigham had no license to practice in Maryland. Police say that they found the remains of unborn babies—the victims of late-term abortions—in freezers in his clinic.

Kampala, Uganda: Umar Mulinde, a Protestant pastor and former sheik who converted to Christianity from Islam, suffered severe burns following a Christmas Eve acid attack near Kampala, Uganda's capital. "I heard a man say in a loud voice, 'Pastor, pastor,' and as I made a turn and looked at him, he poured the liquid onto my face as others poured more liquid on my back and then fled away shouting, 'Allahu akbar,'" Mulinde recounted.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

1. In the narthex, we have a sign-up sheet for the sponsors of our bulletin covers.
2. There are going to be no confessions this Saturday morning.
3. Annual parish meeting is scheduled to take place on Sunday, January 22, along with a Coffee Hour.
4. Please, continue to look, when grocery shopping, for the ingredients needed for our major fund-raising products. We need margarine, flour, nuts, sugar, sour kraut. No sour cream is needed at this time. Thank you for your continuous support!
5. Next Sunday, January 8, we are going to collect funds for our Mission Fund.
6. Our next Soup Sale is January 21. Please plan to participate.