

LIVES OF THE SAINTS

St. Nektarios, the modern saint

The title of saint is not easily come by in any age, but it is even more difficult in the 20th century, when being a Christian presents none of the hazards of declaring faith in Jesus Christ which the early Christians met with such heroism, thereby earning sainthood. Nevertheless, there was a man in this century whose spiritual light shone with such brilliance that he took his place alongside the saints, whose ranks have closed even tighter with the passing of the centuries. In an age when the only fear a Christian need have was the fear of a fellow Christian, a man named Nektarios rose above the complacency of the Christian community into which he was born to attain the stature of a most holy man among holy men.

Nektarios was born in Selybria, Thrace, now a part of Turkey, in October 1846. He was an average figure in a prosaic setting — until he was 14, when he went to seek work in Constantinople. In that ancient capital, he found himself and by the time he was 21, he was an accomplished scholar and a most devout Christian. Conversant in the classics and in religious learning, he entered the monastery on the island of Chios.

Later, Nektarios entered the service of Patriarch Sophronios of Alexandria, Egypt who gave him a scholarship to study theology at the University of Athens. After his theological studies, he was ordained a priest to serve in Cairo, Egypt where his success earned him elevation to the episcopate. The forces of envy, however, followed by enemies in his very own Christian community. When so much pressure was brought to bear on Patriarch Sophronios, Nektarios was stripped of his authority and duty. This grievous injustice spurred him to greater achievements in Athens where his great wisdom was reasserted. It was not long before his popularity as preacher and theologian brought countless invitations to preach in the many churches of the ancient capital and led to his appointment as dean of a theological school in 1894.

This appointment could have been an oasis for a less determined clergyman, but for Nektarios it was the launching pad for

meteoric achievements in the service of Jesus of Nazareth. Among other things, he established a convent for nuns — a lovely cloister named in honor of the Holy Trinity — on a small island just off the coast of Piraeus known as Aegina. When he reached the age of retirement, he left behind the ease and comfort of the city to go to a small retreat he had seen on the tiny island.

A man who walked with God, Nektarios was sought out on his island retreat by many of the faithful and his kindness and piety were seen by the countless pilgrims he welcomed. A second chapel within the convent walls was erected and it was in this chapel that Nektarios was buried when he died November 9, 1920. But the story of Nektarios does not end with his death. People continued to travel to the island to pray at what was then the shrine of a renowned bishop, but not yet a saint. With reports of miraculous cures at his grave, the stream of pilgrims continued and the island teemed with those who sought a closeness to God by proximity to the late bishop. The pilgrimages to the convent of the Holy Trinity continued through the years and culminated in 1961 when a proclamation of the Patriarchate declared sainthood for Nektarios, 41 years after his death.

Considered as the patron saint of people stricken with cancer, heart trouble, arthritis and epilepsy, among other illnesses, St. Nektarios reposes on his tiny island, venerated by Orthodox Christians everywhere. Many of the elderly faithful were privileged to have seen him and now glory in telling their children or grandchildren how they were in the company of a man who is now a saint of God.

The veneration of St. Nektarios is quite widespread in America and is increasing daily. More and more churches now display his icon, which can also be found in thousands of homes of Orthodox Christians.

(Reprinted with permission from Orthodox Saints, Vol. 4 by Fr. George Poulos.)

Lecture highlights Greek presence in Asia Minor

BROOKLINE, Mass. — Dr. Paschalis Kitromilides, professor of political science at the University of Athens, presented a lecture on October 18 at Hellenic College/Holy Cross School of Theology on “The Greek Presence in Post Byzantine Asia Minor and its Academic Study.”

The lecture surveyed the history of Hellenism in Asia Minor from the battle of Manzikert in

1071 to the start of the early 20th century, and highlighted ways in which the Greek Orthodox communities managed to survive.

Dr. Kitromilides urged students and faculty to become acquainted with the history of the region as it raises awareness of minority cultures and gives Greek Orthodox Christians a better understanding of their religious identity.

The lecture was sponsored by the New York Life Insurance Co. Center for the Study of Hellenism in Pontus and Asia Minor at Hellenic College.

Dr. Demetrios S. Katos, dean of Hellenic College, said the New York Life endowment enables HC/HC to develop scholarship in modern Greek studies and helps the institution disseminate knowledge of this period.

Religious Ed 101

Church Architecture

Adapted from the website of the Holy Cross Sts. Constantine and Helen Church of Huntsville, Ala.

Orthodox churches consist of three major areas: the Narthex, the Nave and the Sanctuary.

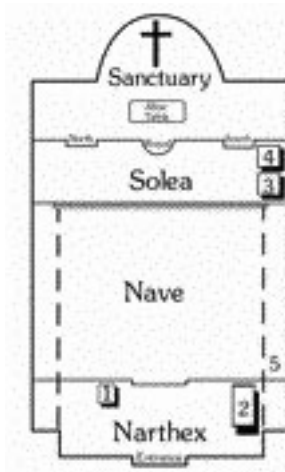
The Narthex is where one enters the church to light a candle and venerate icons. It is also where converts, not yet baptized, once stood, restricted from entering the church any further.

For them, liturgy participation was limited to when the priest's command of “the doors, the doors” was uttered. Just as now, it signaled the service's transition from the Liturgy of the Catechumens (for students) to the Liturgy of the Faithful (for the baptized). The narthex doors were then closed off, while the most sacred part of the service proceeded in the Nave, commencing with the Nicene Creed.

You had to, therefore, be ecclesiastically prepared to participate in the entire Liturgy. At that time, penitents also remained in the Narthex.

The numeral 1 in the floor plan denotes the icon stand and 2, the candle lighting area.

The Nave (or Catholicon) is the largest area of the church where



parishioners gather to worship. Starting from the top, literally, the large Pantocrator icon of Christ on the ceiling, watches over all.

Many other icon images grace the walls, windows and, of course, the icon screen.

The Solea is the raised platform before the icon screen. Number 3 denotes the Bishop's Throne, and, 4, the Psaltis' or Cantor's stand.

The Icon Screen center doors are called the Royal Gates. This entry is for use by clergymen during services. It's symbolic of the entrance to Christ's tomb. The left and right, or north and south,

doors are for altar servers and

assistants. The icon screen images are identical from one parish to another, except for one icon: Just to the right of the north door, that icon depicts the parish's namesake saint.

The Sanctuary, the third major area of an Orthodox Church, corresponds to the Holy of Holies of the Old Testament and is the most sacred area of the church. This is where the very Body and Blood of Christ are prepared and offered to the faithful in the form of the Holy Eucharist.

In the sanctuary are the Altar Table, the Book of Gospels, a Blessing Cross, the Candelabra, a Vigil Lamp, the Tabernacle and Censer stand. Above and over the Sanctuary, is a major icon of the Theotokos (meaning God-bearer) with the Christ Child. This icon is also called the Platytera, uniting heaven and earth by the Advent of the Incarnation: Christ's Nativity.

The Apse is the curved wall recess area behind the Altar Table, thus completing the church floor plan layout.

From the Sunday School 10th grade curriculum of the St. Athanasius Church, Arlington, Massachusetts; instructor George Makredes

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