

# HOLY TRINITY

## ROMANIAN ORTHODOX CHURCH



723 N BODINE ST PHILADELPHIA, PA 19123

# CHURCH BULLETIN

Vol. 14 No. 16 \* Sunday April 18, 2021 \* Editor: V. Rev. Fr. Nicolai Buga

## Sunday of Saint Mary of Egypt

### Gospel Reading Mark 10: 32 – 45

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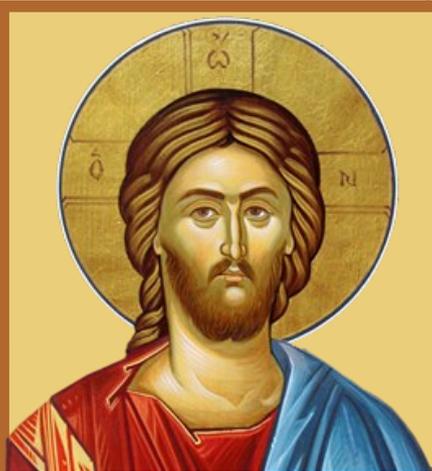
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At that time, the disciples were on the road, going up to Jerusalem, and Jesus was walking ahead of them; they were amazed, and those who followed were afraid. He took the twelve aside again and began to tell them what was to happen to him, saying, "See, we are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be handed over to the chief priests and the scribes, and they will condemn him to death; then they will hand him over to the Gentiles; they will mock him, and spit upon him, and flog him, and kill him; and after three days he will rise again." James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came forward to him and said to him, "Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you." And he said to them, "What is it you want me to do for you?" And they said to him, "Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory." But Jesus said to them, "You do not know what you are asking.

Are you able to drink the cup that I drink, or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with?" They replied, "We are able." Then Jesus said to them, "The cup that I drink you will drink; and with the baptism with which I am baptized, you will be baptized; but to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared." When the ten heard this, they began to be angry with James and John. So Jesus called them and said to them, "You know that among the Gentiles those whom they recognize as their rulers lord it over them, and their great ones are tyrants over them. But it is not so among you; but whoever wishes to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be slave of all. For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

### Apostle Reading Hebrews 9: 11 – 14

*Brethren*, when Christ came as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation), he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption. For if the blood of goats

and bulls, with the sprinkling of the ashes of a heifer, sanctifies those who have been defiled so that their flesh is purified, how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to worship the living God!

#### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Gospel & Apostle Readings	1
Fr. Antony Hughes: On the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent	2-3
Liturgical Schedule from April 17 to April 25, 2021	3
Fr. Seraphim Holland: Saint Mary of Egypt Shows Us How to Repent	4-6
Fr. Gheorghe Calciu: Homily on the Feast of Great Martyr George	7-8

Synaxarion Sunday April 14, 2019 (Saint Mary of Egypt Sunday): Holy Hierarch Pachomius, Bishop of Roman; Holy Hieromartyr Martin the Confessor, Bishop of Rome; Holy Martyr Tomais of Alexandria

## On the Fifth Sunday of Great Lent

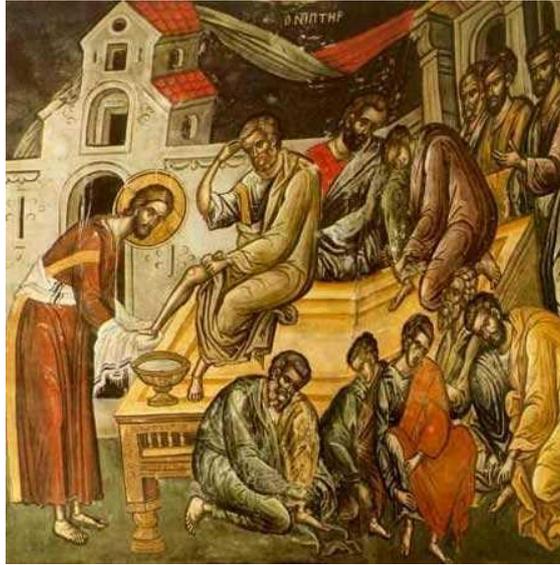
“Whoever would be great among you must be the servant of all.”

One of the very first things we learn as we begin to pursue the spiritual life is that everything we can see and touch is temporal. Everything is changing and everything that changes eventually passes away, including us. There is no security or lasting happiness in anything that passes away so it makes no sense to attach to them as if there is. Trying to hold on to temporal things is like trying to carry water in a bucket filled with holes or trying to our satisfy thirst with sea water. A good deal of suffering has

its origin in the vain pursuit of the perfect relationship, the perfect job, the perfect house, the right perfume. We never find them, but in the event that we think we do, at some point they no longer satisfy or disappear altogether.

James and John sought to ensure their own security and happiness in the Lord's coming kingdom, but they did not understand what they were asking for. The greatest in the kingdom, Jesus taught, would be the least among the brethren, the most humble, not the most exalted and powerful. As all of them would learn in the coming days, Jesus leads from the throne of Extreme Humility, that is, the Cross, and not from a throne of earthly power. What James and John were asking for they would not really want. They were asking to share in the humiliation and death Christ would suffer and Jesus assures them that they would. But to sit at his right and left hand was not his to promise.

So many misunderstood who Jesus was and what he meant when he was on earth. The Zealots wanted Jesus to assume political power and restore the kingdom of David in an earthly empire that would rule with the Jewish equivalent of sharia. Many zealots in our time and a good many in our Church are falling into the same temptation and making the same mistake. They believe our Church should become a central combatant in their so-called “culture wars” and align with politicians and political parties in an attempt to impose Christian values on this multicultural and pluralistic society with the heavy hand of a Christian form of sharia. About this Jesus had something to say: “You know that those who



are supposed to rule over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you...”

This shall not be so among you!

“...But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be the slave of all. For the Son of man himself came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” That doesn't sound like the agenda of any political party nor of any politician I know.

Metropolitan Anthony Bloom (and I am most grateful to my brother Fr. Robert Arida for pointing this out in his remarkable sermon on the Cross), “It seems to me, and I am personally convinced, that the Church must never speak from a position of strength. It ought not to be one of the forces influencing this or that state. The Church ought to be, if you will, just as powerless as God himself, which does not coerce but which calls and unveils the beauty and the truth of things without imposing them. As soon as the Church begins to exercise power, it loses its most profound characteristic which is divine love [i.e.] the understanding of those it is called to save and not to smash...”

Mary of Egypt's pilgrimage in the desert was the opposite of the call to worldly power and happiness. She left everything behind to reconstruct her life through absolute abstinence and self-denial. She sought not to master others, but to master herself. In fact, that is the rule we must follow: master yourself; love and serve your neighbor.

So, Christ tells us “Do not labor for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to everlasting life.” And “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness”. Don't attach to things that are dying, but to things that are undying. Since the kingdom of heaven is within, that is where we must search. Matthew the Poor, the great Egyptian monk and ascetic, wrote that the only place we can meet God is within. It is a theme throughout the writings of the Orthodox spiritual writers. When we begin to turn within to discover what is there, after a while we discover a great secret: we discover that there is something within us that is also

undying! The core and center of who we are is undying and unchanging: the image of God and the Kingdom of heaven. Here are a couple of illustrations of how we can utilize this truth in our daily lives.

In the depths of the sea there is always stillness. Even when storms are churning up waves on the surface and chaos reigns, the depths of the sea remain quiet and peaceful. Eventually, when the wind and waves cease (which they always do), the stillness in the depths remains unchanged. The still point in us, the image of God, is like the depths of the sea.

Here is another.

The deep, blue sky is always still and serene even when thunderheads gather and lightening and thunder crash. Even hurricanes have no power to change the sky. Storms come and go leaving no lasting impression on the deep, blue sky. Eventually, storms pass, but the serenity of the sky remains unchanged.

We are not the waves and the wind, we are the ocean's depths. We are not the clouds, white and fluffy or dark and threatening, we are the deep, blue sky. That is who we are. There is stillness in us, a place of calm and quiet. Joseph Campbell wrote, "Find the immovable center and you can survive anything." The spiritual life is about finding that center and learning to remain there. It is nothing less than the kingdom of heaven. This is what Mary of Egypt discovered. When the storm of her lust subsided, she became still and serene like the depths of the sea and the deep, blue sky. How else could she have survived all those years in the desert?

Through this divine discovery we become like yeast hidden in a loaf of bread. The whole world is blessed by our experience of the Grace of God. Leaving behind our dysfunctional ways of life, cleansing our hearts, rewiring our brains, putting on the mind of Christ, our lives begin to mirror nothing less than the Divine Life that already exists within us and the benefits we gain for ourselves reverberate for everyone else. We serve the world by serving the Lord and laying down our lives for all. Fr. Paul Tarrazi wrote that "we are called to do more than love those who hate us, we are called to love those we hate." No where are we commanded to rule like autocrats over anyone. We are called to love and to serve from the center, from the heart.

**Fr. Antony Hughes**

**(Source: <https://www.stmaryorthodoxchurch.org/>)**



## HOLY TRINITY'S Liturgical Schedule from April 17 to April 25, 2019

### **Saturday April 17 (Soul Saturday):**

9:00 am - Matins  
9:30 am - Holy Liturgy  
11:00 am - Memorial Service

### **Sunday April 18 (St. Mary of Egypt Sunday):**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
11:00 am - Sunday School  
12:00 pm - Coffee hour

### **Friday April 23— Holy Great Martyr George:**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
11:00 am - Memorial Service

### **Saturday April 24 (Lazarus Saturday):**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
11:00 am - Memorial Service  
12:00 pm - Sacrament of Confession

### **Sunday April 25 (Palm Sunday):**

9:00 am - Matins  
10:00 am - Holy Liturgy  
12:00 pm - FISH LUNCH  
(fundraising for the *Stăniloae  
Scholarship*, established by our  
Romanian Metropolia to support  
Romanian students at St. Vladimir's  
Theological Seminary in Crestwood,  
NY)

## Saint Mary of Egypt Shows Us How to Repent

This Sunday, the Fifth of Great Lent, we celebrate Saint Mary of Egypt, and she perhaps is the quintessential example of repentance. We read her life this week, a truly, a magnificent and wonderful life. It is so wonderful that Saint Sophronius actually comments, parenthetically, that there will be those who cannot believe that this really happened because of the weakness of their flesh<sup>1</sup>

What was St. Mary's repentance? What did it consist of? It is the *same for us as for her*. It is when our conscience changes, when our conscience convicts of us something.

Now in her case, of course, it was a great shift. She had gone from leading an incredibly heedless life to recognizing her impurity and going deeply into the desert. She made a complete shift in her life. We make little *micro shifts* and we go *back and forth*.

Let us see what the Church says about her repentance. Let us feel it in our heart. We just sang it in the Vespers.

“The pollution of past sins prevented thee from entering the church to see the elevation of the Holy Cross, but then thy conscience and the awareness of thine actions turned thee, o wise in God, to a better way of life, and having looked upon the icon of the blessed Maid of God, thou has condemned all thy previous transgressions, o Mother worthy of all praise, and so has gone with boldness to venerate the Precious Cross.”

So it says that “thy conscience and the awareness of thine actions turned thee.”

Now of course she was venerating the Most Holy Cross, the Precious Cross that was in Jerusalem. It was in a larger piece at that time. And she was changed. But it wasn't the Cross that changed her. It wasn't the Mother of God that changed her. It was *her repentance and her turning to God* that changed her.



And this change actually took a long time. If you read her life carefully, it took 17 years from the time of her repentance for her to no longer be plagued with carnal thoughts and imaginings and drinking songs and desire for wine and for meat and for all of the things that she had before. It took her 17 years to be cleansed of those desires, and she wasn't indulging in any of them; she was in the desert and seeing no people whatsoever, eating almost nothing, being burned by the sun and frozen by the frost. And yet it took 17 years, which included such things as: lying on the ground for a day and a night, begging the Lord to remove from her these thoughts of songs and these desires and these carnal imaginings and, as the life says, a desire for embraces.

But the pivotal thing was her conscience turned. And after her repentance she still thought of herself as dust and ashes and as sinful Mary.

So this gives us an indication, brothers and sisters, of how we should live.

What we have to do is this: We have to cultivate in ourselves the knowledge of what's wrong with us, that there are things that we just don't do right, and there are things we do that are wrong. We must cultivate this idea in ourselves. The world doesn't like us to do this because it's just *too hard* to do, so the world labels it as sometimes poor self-esteem or as not having faith.

Saint Mary had great faith such that when she prayed she was above the ground a forearm's length. But she also was well aware of her sinful life and never forgot it, not a day, not a moment.

It's said of Saint Peter the Apostle that he desired, when he was going to be crucified he asked to be crucified upside down because he didn't feel he was worthy to be crucified in the same way that his Lord was crucified. This is the same Peter, of course, who denied the Lord three times before is crucifixion during His trial.

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He never forgot that. Even though the Lord cleansed him of that sin and restored him and told him to “feed My lambs, feed My sheep”. And Peter of course did all those things, fed the lambs and fed the sheep and became a great apostle. But he never forgot that sin.

Jude, one of the sons of Joseph the Betrothed, and an apostle, never forgot that he sinned against the Lord when Joseph wanted to divide up his inheritance and divide it four ways for four sons, Ruben and Jude and James and Jesus; and Jude didn't want to do it. He said our Lord was not Joseph's son. So he wanted to divide it three ways. So James (he was one of the seventy Apostles, and the first bishop of Jerusalem) offered to have his portion be given to the Lord. Jude repented of that sin many times over, and never forgot it. He referred to himself as Jude the brother of James, even though he was one of the twelve apostles, and his brother was not.

This is the kind of feeling we should have to cultivate about ourselves, brothers and sisters: Humility, so that our conscience can turn.

Now in our case our conscience is going to have to turn every day, so we must cultivate it with silence, with prayer, with fasting, with reading of the Holy Scriptures and holy things, with long services.

Short services don't cut it, really. Oh, they're helpful, but long services really help. And if you don't know this, take me on my word and try it. It will be hard. Sometimes it

will be boring. Sometimes you will think, ‘Wow, I'm just thinking about everything but the services.’ But if you go to long services for a long time, it really changes you, it kind of warms you, and it shapes you.

What things are there that kill our conscience? Well, how about responding to five hundred text messages a

day on your smart phone? I think we should call them stupid phones. I'm not so sure this technology is good for our souls. Oh, yes, it can be used in a good way. But now we are flooded by stuff all the time. How about watching a lot of TV? How about reading magazines that are frivolous or even sinful? How about gossip, pride and indulgence of our desires? The list is very long, actually, of the things that kill the conscience, compared to the list of things that enable the conscience to turn. It's really a very small list of things

that enables the consci-ence to be changed and a long list that can kill the conscience.

We must cultivate in ourselves, brothers and sisters, all things that can turn our conscience and make us aware.

Saint Mary of Egypt lived 17 years of heedless sin. It never crossed her mind during that time that she was sinning. She just did it. She did terrible things. She edited her story, she told Abba Zosimas, because she just couldn't bear to tell him all the things that she had done. But she was not ashamed of any of them until her time of repentance, and then she had changed so magnificently.



Let me read you one thing also that applies to this from matins. I read things from matins as often as possible in this sermon because, to be honest, the majority of my flock never hears matins, and I think that it's the most important service that you can attend in the week. Part of that is because it comes in our usage after Vespers so that there is a time, of softening, getting you ready for deeper prayer. It is very hard to pray walking through the door. Also, the content of matins is so beautifully,

intricately theological. But it's not just theological; there's a warmth to the prayers of Matins that is truly amazing. Whether it is said in the morning (unless it is abbreviated almost beyond recognition) or in the evening, it does not matter. Truly, this is a service that I lament that so much of my flock does not experience. It's very, very important.

The following is from one of the sessional hymns during the canon, after the third ode.

"I am held fast in the mire of sin, and there is no strength or courage in me; the tempest of my trespasses has overwhelmed me.

Look upon me, O Virgin, I entreat Thee, for thou has borne the Word Who alone loves mankind. Deliver me from every sin, from all the passions that destroy my soul, and from every ill inflicted by the enemy, that I may sing with joy. Intercede with thy Son and God, O undefiled, that remission of transgressions may be given to those who in faith take refuge beneath thy protection."

"I am held fast in the mire of sin." That's what Saint Mary tells about herself when she repented. And for those 17 years that she was held fast in that mire, she felt it deeply. And after she was delivered from it and lived more like an angel than a human being, she still remembered.

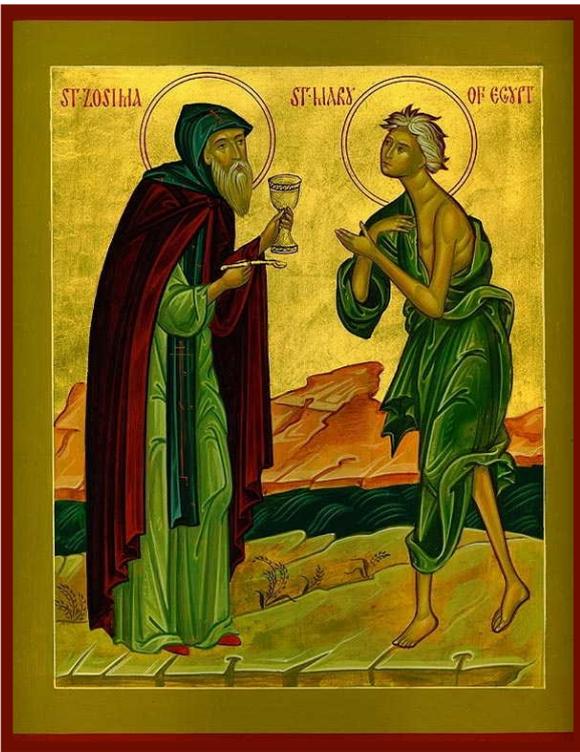
We must cultivate in ourselves this feeling. Ask yourself, do you feel this about yourself? Do you really feel deeply that you are held fast in the mire of sin, that there is no strength in you, or courage in you? This is not to feel absolutely defeated, this is not to say I can't accomplish anything. This is to say I can't accomplish anything *with-*

*out help.* We must have this humility about ourselves.

If we consider ourselves to be held fast in the mire of sin - it's true whether you believe it or not - then we will make progress, because we will beg the Lord for help. We will beg the most Holy Theotokos to pray for us. We will beg our Guardian Angel to guard and keep us and the saints to intercede for us, and we will change. And when God whispers to us in those words that cannot be uttered from the Holy Spirit, we will react to them, we will understand and then and we will change.

*But we must have the right disposition.* And the right disposition is to say I am a terrible sinner, the worst of all sinners and yet God will save me by His mercy. We must cultivate this feeling. Saint Mary had it, and we should be in awe of her repentance. But not believe for a moment that her repentance is only a *unique* experience, a unique event not to be repeated. No, it should be repeated every day, with us too. God calls us to this level of repentance also.

So cultivate this idea in your heart, brothers and sisters.



It's not easy to do. Like I said, there are things you can do. Prayer and fasting, giving yourself more time for prayer, the Jesus prayer, is pretty much essential. Things you shouldn't do: Watching television and foolish books and gossip and all the rest.

But primarily, with all these things that you should do and shouldn't do, you must put your trust in God completely, and that's what Saint Mary did and that's what all the saints did. And the reason we are mediocre is because we don't do this completely.

So may God help us to completely trust in God.

"The blessing of the Lord be upon you through His grace and love for mankind, always now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."

**Fr. Seraphim Holland**

(Source: <http://www.orthodox.net>)

## Homily on the Feast of Great Martyr George

The Church venerates as saints a number of warriors who served in the Roman army. Christianity was then very widespread, and when Christians were under the persecutions, they preferred eternal glory and the unfading crown of martyrdom over worldly military glory, publicly confessing their faith in Christ and not denying it though it cost them their lives.

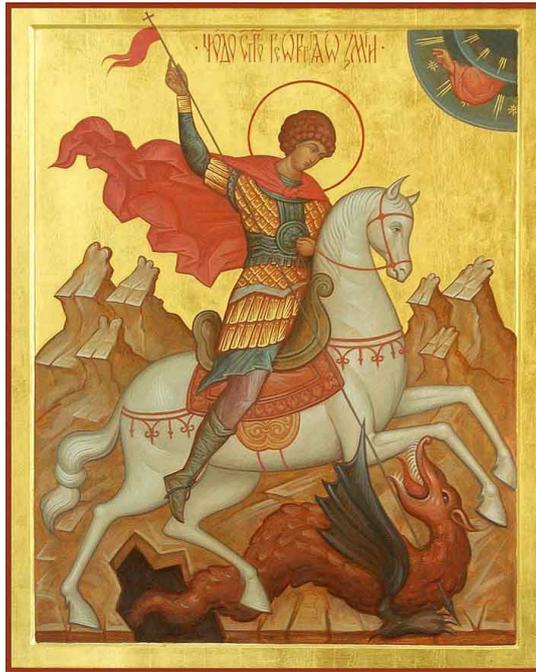
Great Martyr George lived during the time of Emperor Diocletian, who ruled from 248-305. He was an emperor who was very inclined toward the pagan gods. For this reason he took a very antagonist position against Christians. His persecutions

against Christians, which lasted all the way to the year 305, were possibly the cruelest and longest. Then he became mentally ill, and his own victims began to “persecute and chase” him. He was continually threatened with murder. Therefore he left his palace on the Dalmatian coast and lived in isolation, never receiving anyone except his guards; however he was afraid of them also and his life became quite torturous. It is supposed that he died in the year 313, and that is when the persecutions against Christians ended. He died all alone, after living in the horror of all his fears, which gave him no peace.

We have this information from Lactantius, a very educated man who served as a tutor in Diocletian’s home.

In the beginning Diocletian did not repress Christians so fiercely—that is, not to death. Meanwhile, Lactantius became a Christian and lost his position, but he wrote a chronicle of the time of Diocletian; and in the book, *On the death of persecutors*, we can see that all those who persecuted the Church of Christ ended badly, the clearest example being Diocletian, whom he knew during the emperor’s best years as well as during his period of insanity.

Diocletian’s insanity was dark—he was a man terrorized by inner fears. It continually seemed to him that any minute the Christians would come, that Jesus would come and punish him for the murders he committed, and therefore he persecuted them even more fiercely.



As I said, at first the persecutions were not so harsh. The first form of persecution was the decree that all who serve in the army must sacrifice to the gods if they want to stay in the army, and if they don’t, they will be dismissed. This was his first persecution. Meanwhile he visited pagan oracles, who always gave him confused answers. These oracles told him that he has to persecute Christians. Then, in 303, he issued a very harsh decree stating that all the Holy Scriptures in the Christians’ possession must be handed over to the authorities and publicly burned on the town squares.

In this situation, his father-in-law, Galerius, set two fires in the emperor’s palace in Nicomedia

where Diocletian was living at the time, and accused the Christians of the arson. Then Diocletian ordered that all the clergy (priests and deacons) be arrested, and he forced them to sacrifice to the gods. Thus were many Christians subjected to tortures, thrown to wild beasts to be eaten, and killed; and Christianity was given an extraordinarily large number of martyrs.

This persecution encompassed the entire empire. It reached as far as Romania, when the martyrs Zoticus, Atalus, Philippos, Kamasisos were killed in Niculițel... This was widespread persecution. Then Diocletian ordered that all soldiers, not only officers, who believed in Christ and confessed their faith must be punished.

In these conditions St. George decided to confess his faith in Christ. He came from a highly placed family, was therefore well educated, and his parents were Christians. He had a handsome appearance, was one of the bravest fighters, and because he was so gifted and distinguished in battle Diocletian very quickly promoted him and made him commander of the imperial guard. He was in this rank when Diocletian issued his decree, which applied to all Roman citizens, who were compelled to sacrifice to idols on the square once a month. Then it was discovered that there were many Christians, perhaps tens, even hundreds of thousands, and they were all going to have to suffer. Under these circumstances St. George resolved to confess his faith in God and Christ before the emperor and the senate.

When the emperor was sitting in the senate and making decisions, St. George entered and started talking about his faith in Christ as the King. He said that he prefers to serve Christ rather than the emperor of a pagan empire, and his service to Christ will consist not in wielding the sword and military victories, but in bringing himself as a sacrifice for Christ's sake. He confessed before all that he was ready to receive a martyr's death. This witness of St. George, who had earned the emperor's love and the senate's praise, provoked confusion and regret—but also displeasure.

The emperor ordered St. George arrested. They put him in prison and demanded that he deny his faith. But because he refused to do this, he was given over to all kinds of tortures and became possibly one of the most tormented martyrs: his feet were locked in red-hot iron sandals with nails, he was put on the wheel, thrown into the sea with a stone around his neck but as it says in his Akathist, he stood on the waves of the sea as on dry land, he was thrown into quicklime, but was not harmed in the least.

God gives His martyrs special spiritual strength, and I have seen this in prison. That is, completely weak people, sick people who are barely breathing—like Valerian Gafencu—did not feel any suffering and continued to confess God, blessing their tormentors. Such was Gafencu, who died like a saint. So it was with all the martyrs. God gives them strength, and sometimes they do not even experience any physical suffering. Their flesh was torn with iron claws, nails were pounded into the hands and feet, they were burned with fire, and they felt no pain. God gave them this strength to pass through sufferings.

And the fact that they did not deny God, and that after they were burned they went forth to people unharmed, led many of those present at the tortures to repent and join the ranks of Christians. This was an enormous service the Christians did. Therefore our Church says that *the blood of the martyrs is the seed of Christianity*. The more Christians there were tortured and killed, the more Christians came out of their blood. They saw their steadfastness, the power of God, the miracles, and they repented. Right then and there, during the tortures, they came forward and confessed their faith before the emperor, declaring that they too are Christians. And often scores of them were thrown into the arena, where the beasts ripped them to shreds and the soldiers put them to death.

There was a close connection between St. George and me. When I was in prison I always called upon him, and he helped me in many circumstances. From that time on and to this day I never cease to pray to him every day. I am convinced that between a saint and those who pray to him a close connection is formed, and often many of the saint's qualities, if you have a close spiritual connection with him, appear in you also.

In my case, for example, just as St. George went through prison, so did I; as St. George was strengthened by God in difficult circumstances, so was I strengthened in the most difficult moments, when I might have perished not only physically but also spiritually. But the saint's presence strengthened me, because he gives to those who bear his name firmness in faith and spiritual protection, which God gives us through him.

Pray to the saint whose name you bear, and he [or she] will help you. Turn to him in times of sorrow and sickness; in difficult circumstances and in moments of joy: "St. John (or, St. George), my protector, pray to God for me, a sinner!" Pray to him and he will hear your prayer! He is your advocate before God, the advocate of all those who bear his name. He brings our prayer before God and intercedes for us.

At the end of life, when we depart for the other world, our patron saint will be standing next to us. If we venerated him and prayed to him, he will stand next to our guardian angel to protect us from Satan's accusations.

This is because at the personal judgment the devil pulls out all our sins, even those we don't remember, exhibits them for everyone to see, and throws them on the scales. And we must have an advocate to defend us, who will make all our good deeds known. After all, we will be so humiliated that we may not even remember our good deeds, just as we forgot our sins. But our guardian angel and patron saint will come and place all our good deeds on the scales. And often one tear surpasses all the evil deeds we did throughout our whole lives.

Therefore I ask you to remember the saints whose names you bear, and pray that they would protect you, protect your families, your nation, and all people.

#### **Fr. Gheorghe Calciu.**

(From vol. *Cuvinte vii [Living words]*. Bacău: Editura Bonifaciu, 2009). English translation by <https://orthochristian.com/79345.html>