

On the 17<sup>th</sup> of July, the holy Church commemorates  
the holy and gloriously triumphant Martyr  
MARINA of Antioch in Pisidia.<sup>1</sup>



Saint Marina

Marina, the blessed maiden and goodly virgin-martyr, was from Antioch of Pisidia.<sup>2</sup> The daughter of notable parents, she lived during the reign of either Emperors Claudius II (268-270) or Diocletian (284-305). Her father, Aidesios, a solemn priest of the idols, was respected throughout the city. As her parents' only child, Marina's mother died a few days after giving birth to her. Aidesios then took the infant and gave her to be nursed by a certain woman

dwelling outside the city, at a distance of fifteen stadia.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The Life of Saint Marina was recorded in Greek, which manuscript begins: "Nothing is able...." The text is extant in the Athonite monasteries of the Great Lavra and Iveron. The text was rendered in simpler Greek by Agapios the Cretan, who published it in his *Kalokairine*, which was revised and incorporated into *The Great Synaxaristes*. At the Great Lavra there is also preserved another version of her martyrdom, which text begins: "The resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ...." A sermon by the Cypriot Gregory, Patriarch of Constantinople, whose manuscript begins: "Christ, the head of the Church...." The text is extant in the Athonite monasteries of the Great Lavra and Pantocrator. A portion of her sacred head is at Saint Cyprian's Monastery in Athens. Her right hand is treasured at the Athonite Monastery of Xenophontos. Other portions of her miraculous relics are also at Mount Langa Monastery, overlooking Lake Ohrid.

<sup>2</sup> Antioch, a Roman city of southern Asia Minor in Phrygia, was situated north of the territory of Pisidia. Not only was Antioch an important 1<sup>st</sup>-C. commercial hub, but a center for the spread of the Gospel. Inhabited by many Jews, the Apostle Paul preached in this city's synagogue and founded a church there during his first missionary journey [Acts 13:14-49]. In reaction to the apostle's success, the Jews at Antioch caused some influential women to turn against the Gospel and to have Paul and Barnabas driven out of the city [Acts 13:50]. In spite of the persistence of his opponents, the apostle returned twice to Antioch to support his converts [Acts 14:21; 16:6].

<sup>3</sup> Approximately 1.72 miles.

God's special providence was at work here when the maiden was taken outside her home to a Christian nurse living in a Christian neighborhood. As Marina passed through the normal milestones of infancy and early childhood, when she learned to talk, she also heard certain words about the Faith of Christ in that place. By nature, she possessed a pure soul and good disposition. Moreover, she was uncommonly intelligent, wise, and prudent. She received, straightway, the word of salvation when she heard that Christ is the good God, eternal and most compassionate. She learned and accepted that He became man for our salvation and was voluntarily crucified. She believed that He rose in glory and ascended into the heavens; and that the nature of humanity is honored through Him Who sits at the right of the Father. Hearing these and many other doctrines, the seed of Faith took root in that grace-filled maiden. Marina's faith began like a grain of mustard seed which, when cast upon the good soil of her soul, waxed into a great tree where the fowls of the air would lodge in the branches.<sup>4</sup> Again, as good and fertile ground, she heard the word and understood it, which brought forth fruit a hundredfold.<sup>5</sup> We speak here of her martyrdom for the Orthodox Faith.

As the lass increased in physical age, more so did she advance in knowledge, understanding, and prudence. The desire for Christ was aflame in her heart. Daily, she entreated our Savior that she be counted worthy to enter the community of martyrs and to partake of their contests for the Faith. The God-enlightened maiden not only in her soul meditated upon this course but also in her speech spoke of it to whomever she encountered. She confessed to everyone that she was a Christian, and rebuked idol madness. Due to her candid profession, her father according to the flesh—though certainly not in spiritual matters—despised her with all his soul. When the ruthless Aidesios heard Marina's confession of the Christian Faith, he not only refused to look upon her countenance but he also chose to disinherit her. When her earthly and mortal father turned away from her, so much more was she received by the heavenly and eternal One Whom Marina loved with all her heart. Moreover, all those whom she beheld tortured, beaten, and slain for Jesus' name, she revered and desired to be numbered among them. She, too, pondered upon witnessing for Christ, when He so dispensed by His grace. Her turn, indeed, would come; for if one believes in Christ by word and thought, one must also glorify Him with works. With this in mind, she desired to be tried for the Faith, so she might glorify Christ in His kingdom together with the other martyrs. Now the manner of this holy maiden's contest took place during the fifteenth year of her life.

<sup>4</sup> Lk. 13:19.

<sup>5</sup> Mt. 13:23.

At that time, the prefect of Anatolia, name Olymarios, was a savage and brutal man. It happened that as he was traveling through Asia Minor, he



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passed through Antioch of Pisidia. On the road, he espied the comely virgin Marina who was tending her father's flock. Admiring the maiden's exquisite beauty, his heart was consumed with carnal desire. Hence, that thrice-accursed man thought to take her as his wife. Thereupon, he ordered his men to conduct her to the judgment hall for an interview. As Marina was escorted on the road, she prayed that the Lord grant her wisdom and power to guard right-believing piety to the end. She also asked that the Lord enable her to overcome torments and to be crowned with the holy martyrs. Arriving at the palace, Olymarios asked her name, her family, and in what deity she believed. Without fear, she answered, "They call me Marina. I am the child of freeborn parents; and I hope to become the slave of my God and Savior Jesus Christ Who made all the world." All the bystanders, while delighting in her lovely appearance, were astonished upon hearing such a daring answer. As a consequence of her

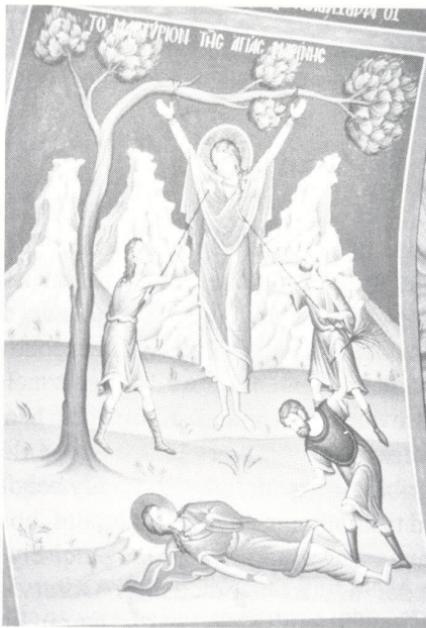
candor, Marina was imprisoned. Now it so happened that, the following day, the entire city was going to celebrate a pagan festival. All were enjoined to offer sacrifice.

After all gathered for the festival, the holy maiden was brought into their midst. It was hoped that if she beheld the others offering sacrifice, she, too, would be persuaded to conform. However, in vain did those irreverent and foolish people meditate. She was moved by neither the prefect's flatteries nor the promise of rich gifts. Moreover, she did not fear his threats, though he warned her that he would submit her to a myriad of punishments. In answer to him, Marina frankly replied, "Have no vain hope for me, O governor! Do not imagine that I should cower before any number of torments. Nothing will separate me from Christ—nay, neither affliction, nor famine, nor fire, nor sword, nor any other harsh tribulation—moreover, not even a violent and very painful death. Think not that thou wilt entice me with honors, gold, or other wealth, because all these things are perishable and temporal. The soul, by the

grace of God, is immortal and desires eternity. For this reason, we, the Christians, wisely disdain these fleeting luxuries and enjoyments. We endure the sorrow and distress of the day that we might attain to everlasting life and eternal rest after our repose. If thou dost think that I lie, here I am, try me, so thou wilt know the truth by means of deeds. Strike me, slay me, burn me, suffocate me, or test me with ten thousand torments. As much as thou wilt worsen the punishment, so much more will Christ glorify me in that future life and blessedness. Ofttimes, in this life, Christ grants us a small consolation as a pledge of that future exultation: He draws us out of the depths of the sea, or rescues us from fire, or saves us from other torments, to your shame and condemnation. Therefore, I do not sorrow for this transient life. Readily, I give my body over to death; for also my deathless God and Master, the sinless One, was crucified for my love."

Marina uttered these and many other things before that tyrant. In his irascible and malignant heart, Olymarios was raving mad with anger. Nevertheless, he still harbored a tiny hope that he might bait her, since he considered her a simple and guileless young woman. He constrained himself by not showing his anger. But rather, attempting to coax her, he said, "I beseech thee, Marina, venerate the gods so thou mightest be delivered from dread torments. Moreover, I promise that I shall take thee as my wife. Thou wilt rejoice above all women of the city and enjoy every comfort."

Now the imprudent Olymarios vainly uttered other similar nonsense. Observing that the Christian maiden mocked and disdained his words, he could no longer conceal the ire within his members. He commanded the soldiers to disrobe her and beat her severely and mercilessly with rods. So cruelly did they thrash Marina that all the ground beneath her was reddened with blood. This is because the rods had thorns which tore her flesh. Christ's martyr bore all the pain courageously without ever sighing, crying, or appearing sullen. It was as though someone else were being tortured and she were standing by. Thus, she stood firm and unbeaten, as she gazed earnestly



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heavenward. Noetically, she invoked God for help and strength to endure the wounding courageously.

After administering this punishment for a long time, the tyrant directed that she be returned to prison. He did not order this based on sympathy, as he was unfeeling and inhuman. Much rather, he did not want her to perish from the stripes; for he intended to inflict further torture. Therefore, she was immured in a dark and comfortless dungeon. After a certain number of days, they brought Marina again to the place of judgment. She was suspended on high where they could rake her sides with iron nails. Her flesh, so torn and mutilated, left her unsightly and wasted. All the comeliness of her body was disfigured. Not only the public sorrowed, wept, and suffered due to her troubles, but even that beastly tormentor turned away from her countenance which was formerly most beautiful and comely. The saint was then returned to that unpleasant dungeon, where they left her uncared for and without food. As broken up and destroyed as her body was, more so was her soul renewed and brighter. Undaunted, she prayed with thanksgiving that the Lord count her worthy to be tormented for His love.

The hater-of-good and malicious demon, beholding that his servant, the chief of that city, could not vanquish one delicate maiden and make her fall down before the demons, wished to test her himself. He, the weak one, thought, perhaps, he could conquer her resolve. Therefore, the devil took on the guise of a great and terrible dragon. Indeed, he appeared as he truly is, injurious and lethal. The all-daring one approached the holy maiden, appearing as a fearful and extraordinary spectacle. From the creature's mouth and eyes there emitted fire and smoke. The beast had chalky white teeth and a tongue as crimson as blood. That evil reptile pounded his tail mightily, causing a terrible commotion. Indeed, only beholding its ghastly aspect would strike fear and trembling in anyone. The saint, however, was not intimidated. She did not leave off praying; for this is precisely what the mischief-plotter attempted to hinder her from practising. Observing that she in no wise cowered, but continued to pray fearlessly, he ran up against her. Widening his mouth and distending his belly, it appeared as though the creature swallowed her.

When the saint beheld that the dragon swallowed her up to the waist, as it appeared to her, she trembled from fear. Straightway, she called upon the saving name of the Savior Christ. With her right hand, she deliberately traced the sign of the Cross over the entrails of the dragon. Having done so, the belly of the dragon was sundered as though by a double-edged sword. Since the dragon was torn apart, it became invisible. The martyr remained unhurt and, vanquishing his wiles, she rejoiced, chanting unto God hymns of glorification and victory. She then recited from the Scriptures, uttering, "Of God's greatness there is no end [Ps. 144:3]; The Lord kills and makes alive [1 Kgs.

(1 Sam.) 2:6]; Thou didst break to pieces the head of the dragon [Ps. 73:14],” and other appropriate verses. The devil, however, being contentious, would not quit his scheming. He wished to test and combat the martyr in another manner. That man-hater, changing from appearing as a dragon, took on the guise of a man—though he appeared exceedingly dark.

Christ’s athlete then seized the creature by the hair. Finding a hammer, she struck his head and back. Thus, she completely humbled him. However, the devil, whose works are dark and ugly, again appeared. This time he ran against the saint as she stood in prayer. Taking her into his hands, he alarmed her with his stentorian voice. He



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threatened to slay her if she did not quit praying, for she troubled him by it. This, however, is as far as his threat advanced. Anything further was not permitted by the Lord; for, if given greater authority, the devil would certainly have slain her on the spot. The devil, wanting in strength, of himself cannot render us evil without divine permission. Though the evil one was permitted to test Christ’s handmaiden, yet she took courage against the tempter. She seized him by the hairs of his head and gave him a whipping.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Some have asked how is it that demons or evil spirits can suffer as we do in the body? They even cite Saint Paul who wrote: “For us the wrestling is not against blood and flesh, but against the principalities, against the powers, against the cosmic rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of evil on account of the heavenly things [Eph. 6:12].” Saint Gregory of Sinai (1255-1360), in his *Texts on Commandments and Dogmas*, comments on Saint Paul’s utterance, writing: “In accordance with this, we must suppose that those who secretly wrestle with us abide in another great world which, in its nature, is akin to the natural powers of our soul.... Thus, three princes, impinging upon the corresponding powers of the soul, wage war against it, each conducting his attacks against the particular part allotted to him.

“At one time, they too were minds; but having fallen away from immateriality and refinement, each of them acquired a certain material coarseness, gaining flesh according to the level and nature of their deeds and practise. For, just like man, they have lost the delights of angels (the angelic taste or the angelic heaven of delight) and

(continued...)

After trampling the adverse foe under her feet, the most modest maiden courageously won the victory in this battle; thus vanquished, the feeble and weakly one vanished. Then, from on high, came the conqueress' rewards and saving good tidings. A great light appeared and illuminated the entire dungeon. The light emanated from a cross, which reached from earth to heaven. Over the cross there flew one white dove, pure and undefiled.<sup>7</sup>

The dove flew down beside the holy maiden and spoke, "Rejoice, Marina, the rational dove of God, for thou hast conquered the evil one and shamed the enemy! Rejoice, faithful and good handmaiden of thy Lord, Whom thou dost desire with all thy heart, for thou hast despised every temporal rest! Rejoice and be glad, the day hath arrived to receive the victor's crown and, with the wise virgins, worthily adorned, to enter the bridal chamber of thy Bridegroom and King!"

As these words were spoken above the saint, her flesh was renewed with the dew of the Holy Spirit. All of her wounds were completely healed. Not even a trace



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of scarring remained on her body. Thereupon, she was filled with joy and gladness. Rejoicing, she confessed God in a great voice, saying, "I bless thee, O Lord, and I hymn Thee, O my God, and glorify Thy name; for Thou hast done wondrous things for me, Thine unworthy handmaiden. I exalt Thee, O

<sup>6</sup>(...continued)

have been deprived of divine bliss; so too, like ourselves, they began to find pleasures on earth, when they became material and acquired the habit of material passions.

"Nor should we wonder at this, since our own soul, created wise and thoughtful in the image of God, having refused to know God, has become bestial, senseless, and almost insane through delighting in material things. For habit is wont to alter nature and change its action in accordance with the direction of the will." See, *Writings from the Philokalia on Prayer of the Heart*, trans. from the Russian by E. Kadloubovsky and G. E. H. Palmer (London, UK: Faber and Faber, 1975), ¶ 122, 123, pp. 66-68.

<sup>7</sup> The Greek hagiographer of Saint Marina suggests the following: the light symbolizes the glory of the Father; the cross, the crucified Christ; and the dove, the Holy Spirit.

Lord, and praise Thee, for Thou hadst mercy on me. Thou hast healed my soul and body. Thou hast not delivered me into the hands of my enemies. Thou hast shown me enormous apparitions of the pernicious dragon, together with other deadly serpents and demons which Thou didst plunge into the abysses. Now, again, that my spirit rejoices in Thee, my God and Savior, I ask of Thee one other favor from the wealth of Thy goodness: vouchsafe that I should be born anew in the font of holy Baptism, so I might end with the water of regeneration. Likewise, sanctify me with the blood of the contest that I might be made worthy of entry amid Thy saints; for only Thou art holy Who hast Thy resting-place and glory in the saints, together with the unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen."



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Praying thus all that night, the saint continued in prison rejoicing and glorifying God. The following morning, as Olymarios sat upon his throne before all the people of the city, he directed that the Christian maiden be brought forward. When the prefect beheld that she was completely healthy and cheerful of countenance, he marvelled and said to her, "Dost thou see, O Marina, how the great gods have attended to thy care? For they have pitied thy marred beauty and have healed thy mutilated flesh. Thou must, therefore, not appear ungrateful to their benefactions. Thou oughtest to render a worthy offering and become their priestess, sacrificing unto them with thy father Aidesios." Saint Marina replied, "Thy senseless and weak gods did not heal me, but the true and only God Who heals souls and bodies. He it is Whom I shall worship forever; and He it is Whom thou must also know; for, thou art only to worship Him, as immortal, and despise the idols of deception and vanity."

The tyrant then ordered that the saint should be unclothed and raised aloft upon wood. The executioners burned her sides and chest with fiery torches. Though the saint endured many hours of flaming and smarting pains, yet she prayed calmly within her heart and gave thanks to the Lord. Afterward, the pagans brought out a huge cauldron in their midst and filled it with water. Fettering the martyr with mighty bonds upon wood, they lowered her into the cauldron. They intent upon plunging her headlong into the cauldron that she might drown in the waters. Yet, the mindless ones toiled in vain. When they were about to immerse her, she cried aloud, "Lord Jesus Christ, Who loosed the bonds of death and raised the dead, Thou, O almighty One, look down also

upon Thy handmaiden and disperse my bonds. Let this water be for me life eternal and the fulfillment of my desired Baptism, so I might strip the old and corruptible man and put on the new and immortal."<sup>8</sup>

After uttering this prayer, they cast her into that vessel of water. Straightway, a great earthquake occurred. The same dove hovered over the water, holding a crown in its beak. Also, there appeared a fiery column with a cross on top. While this took place, the saint emerged from the waters freely, for she was loosed from all bonds. She stood upright with indescribable joy. With all her soul, she glorified and magnified the All-Holy Trinity; for she speedily received what she desired and was enlightened supernaturally. Now this was not the only miracle that took place at that time for the saint. There occurred another extraordinary event. The dove lighted upon the martyr's head, holding that unfading crown, and spoke in a sweet voice to her and said, "Peace to thee, O handmaiden of God. Take courage, and receive from the right of the Most High this heavenly crown."

When the divine dove uttered this—lo, the wonder!—it raised its feathers as though rejoicing in the fulfillment of what was coming to pass. The dove then flew off and perched atop the radiant cross, and spoke to the martyr in the hearing of all, "Come to the upper mansions of Paradise, O godly bride Marina, to enjoy the incorruptible crown in the beloved tabernacles of God, so thou mightest eternally rejoice with the choirs of the saints in a place of rest." All the dwellers of that city heard this divine voice. This instilled fear and trembling. Many, consequently, came to believe in Christ. Numberless crowds of men and women cried aloud that they were ready to receive death for Christ, the true God.

The prefect, hearing them not only upholding and confessing Christ as God and King but also reviling and blaspheming the emperor and the gods, ordered the slaying of all believers. Those blessed souls, voluntarily, hastened to the slaughter for Christ, as innocent lambs; whereas, those wild and fierce tyrannical pagans then massacred fifteen thousand men, not counting the women which they left unnumbered. Hence, all were baptized with their sacred blood; they needed no other baptism. Having become sacrifices and whole-burnt-offerings to God, the thrice blessed ones were translated to the everlasting kingdom. Thus, Marina, the passion-bearer, was the cause of salvation for many. She sent crowds of martyrs to her Bridegroom before her final contest. The impious Olymarios feared that perhaps the entire city would come to believe in Christ, if the holy maiden were left alive. Though he did not want to eliminate her at this point, he felt enjoined to sentence her to death by the sword. The executioners took Marina and led her to the site of execution,

<sup>8</sup> Romans 6:4, 6.

where the previous Christ-confessing multitudes were beheaded. The saint besought the chief executioner, whom she wished would slay her speedily, and said, "Wait for me a short spell, my lad, while I speak to those standing here and also make my prayer. Then thou canst carry out the order."

After saying this, she turned to the multitude and said, "I beseech you, my brethren and friends, as the unworthy handmaiden of the Most High, hearken with understanding to this small exhortation. You know that only one is true God to be contemplated and worshipped in Father and Son and Holy Spirit. Whoever believes in this triple unity alone is being saved. Therefore, transcend every creation of the visible and sensible world. Elevate your minds and acknowledge only the Father of the lights<sup>9</sup> and His only-begotten Son and Logos, our Lord Jesus Christ, and the All-Holy Spirit. These three Persons are one eternal God, almighty and incomprehensible; and by no other name can one be saved."

After uttering this address to the crowd, the martyr, who received an elevated understanding, lifted the eyes of her mind heavenward and uttered, "O beginningless, immortal, ageless, uncreated, incomprehensible, and unsearchable Lord, God of all and Creator of all creation, Providence and Savior of all, in Whom I hope, I thank Thee for bringing me to this hour and for permitting me to approach the crown of Thy righteousness. I hymn and bless Thy measureless compassion and love for man that has placed me together with Thine elect servants. Look down now upon me, the lowly one, O Master God, Lord of mercy, Ruler of all and the almighty One, and hearken unto my prayer. Fulfill my requests to the praise, honor, and glory of Thy transcendently good and worshipful name. Grant remission of sins to all those who desire to build a church to Thy handmaiden and liturgize therein, to those who record the contest of my martyrdom, to those who read it with faith, and to those who commemorate the name of Thy handmaiden. Grant that they be fruitful accordingly. I say, for all those that serve the dwelling place of my body, and all those that suffer martyrdom for Thy love, forgive their sins according to the measure of their faith. Let no torment, famine, poison, or anything harmful to soul or body touch those that honor me. All those that desire to celebrate my memory with faith and hymns of praise, seeking from Thee salvation and mercy through my intercession, grant them in this life Thy good things. Bestow upon them a plentiful supply of whatever is needful. Count them worthy of Thy heavenly kingdom; for Thou only art good and the Lover of man, and the Bestower of good things unto the ages. Amen."

After praying thus, another earthquake shook that place. People fell to the ground, including the executioner. Indeed, he, who was readying to take

<sup>9</sup> Jas. 1:17.

the saint's life, tumbled over and trembled. Then, the Lord, with a multitude of holy angels, noetically manifested Himself to the righteous maiden and said,



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her soul into her Bridegroom's hands on the 17<sup>th</sup> day of the month of July. She could say with Saint Paul: "Persecutions, sufferings, such as happened to me in Antioch—what persecutions I endured! And out of them all the Lord delivered me [2 Tim. 3:11]." She is now numbered with the ranks of virgins and the armies of the martyrs, as she so much desired.

The holy relics of Saint Marina were then secretly taken up by the Christians and buried in an honorable place, as was meet. The virgin-martyr is now interred in a church built in her honor in Athens, Greece.

By thy supplications, O elect bride, dissolve thou the fetters of my faults and scatter the record of my sins!<sup>10</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Select verse from the Orthros Canon of the Saint, Ode Nine, Mode Plagal Four, by Saint Theophanes.