

On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, the holy Church commemorates  
our holy father among the saints,  
THEODORE, Archbishop of Edessa.<sup>46</sup>

### Saint Theodore's Parents and Childhood

A man from Edessa,<sup>47</sup> named Symeon, took to wife a woman named Mary, and they lived a virtuous life together. They gave birth to a daughter but were very desirous to give birth to a son. Therefore, saddened, they oftentimes went to church and entreated God for a son that they might dedicate him to God from his youth. Then, one day, on the first Saturday of the Great Fast, both Symeon and Mary went to the Church of the Holy Apostles where again they besought God for a son. That evening, both had a vision of Saint Theodore speaking to the divine Saint Paul, saying, "Behold, O disciple of the Lord, how this couple begs to give birth to a son! Therefore, do thou grant this request since thou hast great boldness before the Lord." Saint Paul answered, "The Lord wishes quickly to grant them a son; and thou, O Theodore, wilt name him, for indeed he will be a gift of God."

Mary awoke in joy and told her husband of the vision, only to find out that he had beheld the very same thing. In a few days, Mary conceived and, in time, she gave birth to a son without sorrow or a troublesome labor. When the child turned two years old, they brought him to the archbishop for holy Baptism and named him, as a gift of God, Theodore. When the lad became five, they started his schooling; but, even after two years, the lad still could not grasp any of his lessons. Consequently, both his parents and schoolfellows reproached him. His teacher even struck him, and everyone else upbraided him. Then, during one of the feast days, when the archbishop served, the young Theodore hid underneath the holy Table. During the service, Theodore fell asleep and beheld a most beautiful Child Who gave him honey in the comb. He spoke to Theodore, telling him to become a monk. The beautiful Child then

<sup>46</sup> The Life of Saint Theodore of Edessa—which also contains the lives of the Monk-Martyr Michael of Saint Savvas Lavra (commemorated on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of May), and King John the Persian with the holy three child martyrs (commemorated on the 30<sup>th</sup> of May)—was recorded in Greek by Bishop Basil of Emessa, the nephew of Saint Theodore of Edessa, whose manuscript begins: "Blessed be the almighty God...." The text is extant in the Athonite Monastery of Iveron. The text was rendered in simpler Greek by Agapios the Cretan, who published it in his *Kalokairine*. A festal service was composed to Saint Theodore by the Monk Gerasimos Mikrayiannites, hymnographer of the Great Church.

<sup>47</sup> Edessa (mod. Urfa in Turkey) was the capital of the province of Osrhoene. It lies in the Mesopotamian plain, dominated on the south by a high rock and crossed by the Saisan River. Edessa was a literary and intellectual center of Syriac culture. After it was lost to the Arabs, ca. 640, it remained a key Christian city and commercial center in the Islamic world until the 13<sup>th</sup> C.

gave a staff into Theodore's hands. Theodore understood this Child to be indeed the Master Christ, Who had ordained him to the office of Archbishop by giving him the staff. Therefore, he fell at Christ's feet and said, "Bless me, O Master, that I might learn the sacred Scriptures." When Christ blessed him, Theodore straightway awoke and came out from under the holy Table, at which time, the archbishop asked what he was seeking there. The lad disclosed everything. The archbishop was astonished and ordained Theodore to the rank of Reader.

From that moment, Theodore progressed through his lessons with such ease that the teacher needed only to say the lesson but once, and Theodore learned it. He then was beloved by all and was lauded for his eagerness to learn. He, therefore, in a few years, acquired knowledge and great skill in grammar, rhetoric, and philosophy. When he was eighteen, his parents reposed. The youth distributed most of the inheritance of his parents to the poor, but he gave a portion to his sister (who is the mother of the author of this life), and kept nothing for himself.

### Saint Theodore in Jerusalem

Theodore betook himself to the holy city of Jerusalem and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. He worshipped the Lord Jesus at the very site of Jesus' burial. Upon the spot where our Master Christ was laid to rest, Theodore soaked the marble slab with his streaming tears. He also visited nearby Golgotha, and all the other sites of sacred pilgrimage. He then decided to go to the Lavra of Saint Savvas the Sanctified in the Judaean Desert.

### Abbot John of the Lavra

When Theodore arrived at the lavra, he implored Abbot John to make him a monk. Accordingly, after Abbot John instructed Theodore with great exactness in the monastic conduct of life, he tonsured him. Theodore remained in obedience to the abbot and eased the latter's many burdens. Theodore would humble his body with the labors of the monastery and other hardships. He was wont to nourish his soul with contemplation of the divine Scriptures and other readings of the fathers.



*Saint Theodore*

After Theodore had been living under obedience for twelve years, Abbot John of the lavra was nearing the end of his life. Thereupon, Theodore sought his blessing that he might go into solitude upon his elder's repose. Then, with all his heart and soul, John blessed his departure and said, "Go, my beloved son. I surrender thee to God. I surrender thee, for He will guide thee in His holy will." After he indicated the cell that Theodore was to dwell in, the elder delivered up his soul to the Lord. Theodore received his spiritual father's blessings as a weapon and entered into the stadium of hesychasm.

### The Struggles of Saint Theodore

Father Theodore took up his abode in that cell for twenty-four years, living the angelic life. He owned neither a second garment, nor a sack, nor even a pail. That which made him rich was his possession of faith and virtue. He partook of a little bread and water in measure and slept two hours daily out of nature's necessity. When he arose, he would stand in prayer till the third hour of the day, motionless like a stone column. Daily the blessed one contended with evil spirits, which he made to retreat far by the arrow of prayer.

### The Monk Michael

The venerable elder had a relative and, though he was quite young, he had the mind of an elder. This goodly youth hailed from Edessa, where he had



heard of the virtues of Theodore. Therefore, he went into the Judaean Desert to seek him out. When he located our saint, he prostrated himself before his feet, beseeching him to make him a monk, that he might remain in his company. By the inspiration of the omniscient Spirit, Theodore discerned the nobility of the youth's soul. He tonsured him to the monastic Schema immediately, without a novitiate, naming him Michael. This splendid youth submitted to his elder in all things and maintained excellently the same rule. He also performed a handiwork by plaiting straw baskets, that with such an occupation he might thrust out any wicked thoughts.

At that time, the King of the Persians, Adramelech, and his consort, Seidie, were touring Jerusalem. The honorable Theodore wished to send Michael to sell his handiwork in the city in order to buy biscuits. Michael took his elder's blessing and departed. As he approached the hostelry of the lavra, he greeted the monks. He left his handiwork therein and went to the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. With tears he venerated the shrine and then returned to the hostel. He then took up the baskets and went into the marketplace. Once there he met the eunuch of Queen Seidie, who addressed him, "Young man, follow me, for I shall purchase all that thou hast and meet whatever price thou wilt ask." The guileless Michael, not knowing the wickedness lurking within,

followed him like an innocent lamb to the threshold of the new “Egyptian woman.”<sup>48</sup> He went inside and, when the eunuch announced Michael’s presence to the queen, she, in turn, summoned him to come upstairs. When the “lioness” beheld the young monk, her heart was smitten with satanic lust. The comely Michael was then twenty-two years old and handsomely built. Indeed, his physical presence mirrored the beauty of his soul. However, he was pale and thin from extreme abstinence.

The queen then asked him his business. Michael answered, “I am a poor monk from the Monastery of Saint Savvas.” She remarked, “I see thou art slim, for which I am saddened. If thou art a slave or captive, I shall liberate thee. If thou art ill, I shall heal thee. If thou art poor, I shall give thee whatever thou needest.” The pure youth listened and raised his heart to heaven, and then answered her, “I was at one time in the world and held captive by the devil, but by the grace of Christ God I was freed. I was a slave of sin, but the Master Christ took on the form of a servant and freed me. I was ill and He healed me. I was poor and He has made me rich, so that I require nothing.” The wily queen continued, waxing more brazen, “O young man, what joy thou wilt have if thou shouldest become my lover! But be careful to obey me in whatsoever I tell thee that thou mightest not incur my disfavor, for I will put thee to death with multiple stripes and harsh torments.” He replied, “I have my love toward God and do not wish to receive thine affection, no matter how many punishments thou shouldest inflict upon me; for so much more shall I delight in Paradise.” She retorted, “O thrice-miserable fellow, of how many good things thou hast deprived thyself! Am I not beautiful and worthy of thine every desire, O wretch!” Michael answered her, “Thou art especially ugly and more filthy than dung and a swamp.” The “asp” then was greatly incensed and ordered her men to stretch him out on the ground and to give him a merciless beating. As they struck him, she said, “Since thou hast rebuffed my great



*Martyrdom of Saint Michael*

<sup>48</sup> Gen. 39:7.

honor and gifts, I shall cruelly put thee to death, O most unhappy one!" Nevertheless, the thrice-blessed one, though they thrashed him for many hours, remained courageous in his affliction, being sustained by the hope of those future enjoyments.

After they beat him to the queen's satisfaction, she had him bound and sent with two eunuchs to the king. The profane one wrote down the charges contrary to what actually occurred, which said: "This dreadful and shameless monk dared to offend me. Therefore, put him to death, or I shall die of grief." When the Persian king read her note, he knew it was a lie and that the queen had slandered the monk. However, because of his madness for women and not desiring to disappoint his spouse, he ordered the righteous one to be brought forward. But Michael did not reverence him. The king looked at him angrily, and questioned him, "What hast thou to say in regard to this accusation, O audacious fellow? I think thou art at fault and inexcusably responsible." He said this to cover up the real matter at hand, because he did not want the bystanders—some of whom were Christians—to learn that his wife had actually tried to seduce the monk. However, Michael responded with gravity, "A king ought ever to preserve three things: fear of God, charity toward the people, and righteousness in his judgments."

The king was quite pleased with this prudent response and commanded that the holy man's hands be untied. Afterward, he asked Michael whence he came. He answered, "I am from Mar Savvas" (the Monastery of Saint Savvas). The Persian sovereign continued, "With thy words I wish to judge, for thou hast said that the king ought to perform righteousness. Therefore, when it happens that a thief or an adulterer has been brought before me, how do the laws define my treatment of the guilty?" The righteous one replied, "A man lived near a cobra that killed all about its borders with only a glance. However, this man left and fell into the claws of a bristling and fearful lion." The Persian interrupted and said, "I know the power of the parable. But do thou not fear the mane of the lion, only listen to me in this as I advise thee. For I am saddened to put thy youth to an early death. I, therefore, make the following proposals. I should like to make thee my son. I shall honor thee above my princes. I shall give thee authority over all my wealth, only thou must renounce thy religion." Michael answered, "I, O king, am a servant of my Lord Jesus Christ. I will never separate myself from the belief of the Christians." The king then said, "Therefore, thou dost prefer bodily affliction and wearing that ugly monastic Schema?" The blessed Michael replied, "Much more do I exult in this than thy costly garments!"

At this juncture the king wished to defeat the martyr by his words, and so he said to him, "I am well acquainted with thy Scriptures, both the Old Testament and the Gospels. Within them there is no mention of abstinence

from marriage or meats." Michael answered, "We Christians are divided into two orders, the monastic and the laity. Laymen are permitted to eat meat and to take a wife lawfully. But we, the monastics, refrain from these things, since we are dead to the world and to the flesh. We do not enter into marriage that we might not have to provide for, or have cares on how to please, the world and women.<sup>49</sup> Furthermore, just as the apostle said, we labor solely for the Lord without distraction."<sup>50</sup> The Persian continued, "Paul has deceived you all and has injured you in both worlds: the present life and that of the future." The righteous one answered, "Thou blasphemest; for, on the contrary, Paul has saved the world and teaches us how to be saved that we may delight in the good things to come that neither eye has seen, nor ear has heard, nor has entered into the heart of man!"<sup>51</sup> Then, one man in the company of the king, a Jew, addressed Michael, "Wast not Paul a Jew?" Michael answered, "Yes, but he preached the dogmas and teachings of Christ. He abolished the temple of the old law and showed the grace of truth, that is, what the law and the prophets had prophesied." The king then interjected, "Do what I tell thee: confess Mohammed as a prophet and as an apostle of Christ; and I will make thee my son."

Then Michael questioned the king, "Dost thou, O king, confess Christ as the Son of God?" He answered, "Yea, indeed, I testify this as true." Then the wise youth turned to the Jew, and asked, "And thou, O Jew, dost thou witness to the fact also that the Logos of God established the heavens, and all the might of them by the Spirit of His mouth?"<sup>52</sup> The Jew consented and said, "Verily, that is the truth." Then the martyr of truth, filled with the Holy Spirit, cried aloud, "Behold, thou hast confessed my true Faith, although thou dost not believe as thou oughtest! I did not confess thy deception—away, far be it from me!—for Mohammed is neither a prophet nor an apostle, but a deceiver and deluded, and the forerunner of Antichrist. And thou, O Jew, dost know how Christ came into the world, that He was incarnate by the Holy Spirit and the ever-virgin Mary, and became man. Therefore, do not anticipate another, for he whom thou awaitest is the vile Antichrist, and Mohammed is his forerunner!" At this point, though the Saracens were infuriated yet the Christians rejoiced. The king then, full of wrath, said, "Do either one of two things: deny thy Faith or choose a bitter death." The athlete of Christ answered, "Do thou one of three things: leave me to go to my elder, for I have

<sup>49</sup> 1 Cor. 7:32.

<sup>50</sup> 1 Cor. 7:35.

<sup>51</sup> 1 Cor. 2:9.

<sup>52</sup> Ps. 32:6.

done no wrong; or send me to Christ with martyrdom; or become a Christian and reign for eternity in the heavens."

The king, beside himself with anger, ordered the making of a large charcoal pit. It was ignited and Christ's confessor was placed barefoot therein. Thus, Michael stood many hours in the flames. He neither moved about nor wore a sullen expression. His countenance was bright, as he endured all discomfort with remarkable patience. Afterward, they drew him out of the flames. The tyrant, before he ordered Michael to swallow a drug which caused instant death, said to him, "Now thine end has come. Therefore, either do as I say or drink this cup of death." Michael answered, "I am ready for every torment—whether it be the administration of poisonous drugs, or the sword, or the fire—only that I might not be deprived of my Christ, Who is my life and salvation." Then the Saracens combined honey with the poison and gave it to the king, who said to the martyr, "Receive bitter death with the sweetest honey." The martyr made the sign of the Cross over the cup and drank thereof. By divine assistance, he remained unharmed. The king marvelled at his resistance to any ill effect of the potion. He, therefore, wished to test the potency of the drug. He summoned a condemned prisoner, commanding him to drink of the cup. Straightway, he gave up the spirit as his body burst upon the earth. The martyr stood by unharmed, glorifying the Lord.

Then were the Christians gladdened and the Saracens were put to shame. They shouted to the king, "Either slay this one or blot out the Christians!" Therefore, the king ordered that Michael undergo beheading outside the city. The king's soldiers took Father Michael and escorted him to the site of execution. He was followed by all the people, both Christians and Moslems. The martyr then stood facing the east and, raising his eyes and hands heavenward, prayed, "O most high King, Holy of Holies, I thank Thee that Thou hast vouchsafed me worthy to complete this course. I supplicate Thee that the wicked dragon not bring my soul down into the depths of destruction, but that the holy angels take up my soul to the mansions of rest. For it is Thee, O Lord, Whom I desire. I hymn and magnify the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, one dominion and Divinity, to Whom is due glory unto the ages. Amen." After paying homage to God, the blessed Monk-martyr Michael bowed his head. The executioner brought down his blade and struck off his head.

Soon thereafter, the monks of the lavra's hostel collected the precious relics. Nevertheless, the Christians of Jerusalem would not permit their departure, declaring, "It is here that he suffered martyrdom, and it is here that his holy relics should remain for our sanctification and blessing." But the monks contradicted this, saying that he was nurtured and brought up in the desert. Moreover, as a spiritual son of Savvas the Sanctified, he ought to be

interred in the saint's lavra. Such a heated dispute arose that when the king learned of it, he gave his judgment: the relics were to be taken to the lavra of the deceased monk.

### The Return of the Relics of the Monk-martyr Michael

On that very same day, the Lord revealed the accomplishments of the martyr to the great Theodore. These supernatural tidings caused Theodore to rejoice. He declared the monk-martyr's struggles to all the brethren, saying, "Our brother Michael has completed his martyric contest today in the holy city!" Forthwith, Theodore dispatched monks to take up the sacred relics. They went and took them at night, returning to the lavra chanting.

Then our wondrous God revealed a wonder, as He is the almighty One. A fiery pillar came down from heaven and flooded the place with boundless light. The light escorted the precious relics back to the lavra, and this was seen by the people of Jerusalem. Then Theodore came out to meet the procession, shedding a torrent of tears. The abbot and all the brotherhood were present, holding lit candles and burning incense. They accompanied the precious relics, chanting hymns and troparia to the martyr. It was Sunday when the relics were brought. Now at the lavra one of the brethren, named George, had been ailing for three years. His illness rendered him unable to move. In fact, our Monk-martyr Michael many times had assisted George. Therefore, George begged the brethren to lift him up that he might go into church, for he wished to embrace the holy relics and receive a blessing. Unfortunately, no one attended to George; for they were all too busy providing for themselves. How saddened George was over this deprivation to pay his last respects. With tears and faith, he cried out, "Brother Michael, if thou hast boldness before the Lord, kindly remember thy friend. Do thou beseech our Master that He enable me to venerate thy holy relics!" This is what he uttered—lo, Thy wonders, O almighty Christ!—and George was completely healed. He then hastened to the church where he embraced the saint and, weeping, said, "Truly, O most desired brother, thou hast found great favor before the Lord. Indeed, thou hast truly shown thy love toward me, the wretched one. When thou wast in this life, many times didst thou minister unto me; and now that thou art in the heavens, in a moment thou hast healed me!" Then the holy relics were interred in the place where other holy fathers that were martyred were laid to rest. It was from this incident that the great Theodore was incited to add even more struggles to his previous ones, that is, all-night vigils, fasts, and prayers. These all helped to raise his heart to lofty heights of contemplation and to advance in all quarters.

### Ordination

At that time, during Holy Week, the Patriarch of Antioch, together with his bishops, came to Jerusalem for a certain need. Since two patriarchs

were now together (that is, Antioch and Jerusalem) with their hierarchs, some presbyters and lay people from Edessa came forward. They presented to the holy synod an epistle, praying that they may be granted an archbishop who was learned and virtuous; for many at that time were being led astray and were falling into heresy. Then, the most holy Patriarch of Jerusalem, enlightened by God, uttered the following, "None is more worthy of this ministry than the marvellous hesychast Theodore, who is to be found in the Lavra of Saint Savvas where he leads a life according to the Gospel." When the holy synod heard this recommendation, all consented and voted him to be the Archbishop of Edessa. Straightway, the synod sent for the venerable elder. But the reason for summoning him was not disclosed to Theodore. The synod members preferred to wait for Theodore's arrival and pronounce their God-inspired decision. Thus it took place as they intended. They announced to Father Theodore their divine counsel with regard to him.

However, the blessed Theodore wept bitter tears as he implored the patriarch, "May it not be, my holy *despota*, that I should take upon myself such a heavy burden! For if a tiny boat is overladen, it will surely sink. So it is in my case. If thou shouldest place such a heavy load upon my soul, I shall be in danger of death." Nonetheless, the other hierarchs encouraged Theodore and advised that he should not contradict the Holy Spirit. Indeed, they went through much to get Theodore to agree, but he would not give his assent. Therefore, whether he consented or not, they carried out the ordination on Great Thursday. Our Savior, wishing to reveal the saint's worthiness, made manifest the following miracle. A white dove flew in and perched upon Theodore's holy head. This brought great rejoicing to the patriarchs, hierarchs, and priests who witnessed this, so that they glorified God. After the service, the patriarchs detained Theodore there until after Pascha. On Bright Monday, Bishop Theodore returned to the lavra. He bid farewell to all the fathers. He then entered the holy city and worshipped at all the shrines. Following these events, he left with the Edessenes who were to escort him to Edessa. As he was leaving, he turned and looked back at the holy city and wept, deeming himself unhappy.<sup>53</sup>

### Saint Theodore in Edessa

When they arrived at the Euphrates River, they sat down in a green place. The saint, bringing to mind the holy city and the lavra, began reading this psalm with tears: "By the waters of Babylon, there we sat down and we wept when we remembered Sion...[Ps. 136]," and the rest of the verses. After reciting this, he changed his mind and wished to turn back to the lavra. However, when he slumbered, he beheld a divine vision. He was charged with

<sup>53</sup> Ca. 836.

the following command: "Theodore, thou must not imitate the reluctant servant who hid his talent, but rather emulate the one who multiplied the five and was given authority over ten cities."<sup>54</sup> Take up the yoke of Christ which they have given thee."<sup>55</sup> Theodore awoke and comprehended the power of the vision and said, "May the Lord's will be done!" From that time, he hastened to increase the talent entrusted to him. When the holy one arrived in Edessa, the entire city went out to greet him with great reverence as was meet. That Sunday, he liturgized and blessed the flock. He instructed them for their salvation, and they all rejoiced.

### The Stylite Theodosios

One day, Theodore ventured out of the city and came upon many pillars. He inquired who had erected them, and they said, "They were constructed from the time of the pious Emperor Maurice,"<sup>56</sup> and it is there that many stylites have lived." The saint continued, "And is there any one of them remaining?" They answered that only one now inhabited the place, named Theodosios, who was extremely old. However, they added that due to his advanced age, he talked at random and oftentimes with ill-timed words. When the divine Theodore heard this, he understood that the stylite was virtuous. He, therefore, went to visit Theodosios—but alone. He greeted the stylite and besought him, saying, "I entreat thee, O most honored father, speak unto me a word of salvation and strengthen my heart; for I am greatly saddened by the burden of the archbishopric which they have laid upon me." Theodosios answered, "I shall speak with thee as God enlightens me, but do be careful to keep whatever I say between us until the Lord should take my soul. Do not grieve over the archbishopric which thou hast received, for the almighty One shall make it easy for thee to pass through all obstacles and to expel all the heretics from the Church. There will be those that are against thee, thinking thee harsh and unjust. But God will vouchsafe thee the grace to convert the Persian king to piety, after thou healest him of a bodily infirmity. He then will assist thee in whatsoever thou shouldest require."

The honorable Theodore then asked Abba Theodosios, "Tell me, O spiritual father, how many years hast thou been atop this pillar? And for what reason didst thou ascend it?" The elder then, from the depths of his heart, sighed and answered, "When I was a young man, I left the world with my older brother. We went to a monastery and dwelt there for three years. Then, in accordance with the will of our spiritual father, we went into the wilderness of Babylon, an angel of the Lord accompanying us. Once there, we found a

<sup>54</sup> Lk. 19:17.

<sup>55</sup> Mt. 11:29, 30.

<sup>56</sup> Emperor Maurice reigned from 582 to 602.

cave and remained therein and subsisted on herbs and fruit from the trees. Thus we lived and glorified God. After dwelling there a considerable length of time, one day, I espied my brother about the distance of one stade where we used to collect herbs. All of a sudden, I saw him make the sign of the Cross and leap back. He appeared as one who had seen something exceedingly frightful. Then he drew back and went into the cave to hide. I was very amazed at this action and crept up to see what had frightened him, only to behold a pile of gold florins. I, too, made the sign of the Cross and then took off my *rason* and spread it on the ground and started to pile up the gold, as much as I was able to lift. Without discussing the matter with my brother, I went into the city and purchased a splendid piece of property with springs and walled in with trees. It was there that I built a richly appointed church with many cells, an infirmary, a hostel and whatever else a coenobium might need, after which, brethren came as well as a good shepherd to lead them. I then gave him one thousand gold pieces for the necessities of the monastery. The remainder, I distributed among the poor, not holding back even a denarius for myself—and that includes nothing for my fare or food—but everything went either on the sacred construction or into the hands of the poor."

With these words did the venerable Elder Theodosios explain his story and, all the while lamenting and sighing, he wiped away his tears and continued, "After all this I went back into the desert to find my brother. I, moreover, had thoughts of high-mindedness. I thought inwardly that my brother did not know how to manage the gold that he found, and thereby lost his reward. But I, on the other hand, performed well in what was a God-pleasing work. Thus did I, the fool, reason within myself. Then, all of a sudden, I beheld the angel that had first accompanied us when we went into the desert. He chided me: 'Why art thou entertaining such vainglorious thoughts? Why hast thou lifted up thy heart with thoughts of self-conceit? Know that thy toils and labors all this time—the building of the churches and monasteries and the almsgiving—does not compare to thy brother's leaping away from the pile of gold. For when he beheld the coins, he disdained it that he might keep the commandment of God to prefer utter penury. But thou hast thought to please men. Therefore, his action is more God-pleasing. Thou hast not come to his measure. Since thou hast vaunted thy vanity, thou art unworthy to behold his countenance for the remainder of thy life. Thou shalt neither speak with him nor converse with me until thou hast mourned with deep humble-mindedness thy vain folly for forty-nine years.'"

Then after a short spell, the elder composed himself and continued his history: "After the angel uttered these words, he was taken up into the heights. I went back to my brother's cave and, not finding him, I wept and went throughout the desert searching and calling out his name the entire week.

Then, on the seventh day, the voice of the angel came to me and said: 'Get thee hence, to Edessa, and ascend the pillar of Saint George! Once there, do thou offer fervent repentance until the Lord should take pity on thee.' Therefore, very sorrowful and sobbing, I left my desert dwelling and came here. I proceeded to walk up and down for forty days. Then I ascended this column, where I abided in solitude for forty-nine years. I contended with my thoughts and with trials from the demons. In the fiftieth year, on the eve of the Feast of the holy Resurrection, my heart became irradiated by a sweet light that dispelled the cloud of passions. I passed the night in vigil with tears and compunction. At the third hour of the day, as I was praying, that very same angel appeared and said to me: 'Peace be unto thee and salvation from the Lord!' Then I said to him: 'Why didst thou abandon me? Why didst thou turn thy face from me? Why didst thou separate me from my brother? Knowest thou not that I have been made to undergo very many trials?' The angel answered me: 'This has happened on account of thy high-mindedness and for finding fault with thy brother. However, I did not wish to scorn thee lest thou shouldest abandon monasticism. I, therefore, stood by thee invisibly and guarded thee as the Lord had commanded me. Now though, since thou hast been humbled, the Lord remembered thee. He sent me that I might appear before thee till the end. He shall give thee the grace not only to discern the righteous from the sinners but also to know the future. Also, thy brother lives and he hastens to be reunited with thee in the everlasting kingdom.'" When the archbishop heard the elder's story, he received great joy that he had found such a precious treasure. After Theodore took leave of the stylite, he departed and glorified the Lord.

### Saint Theodore Combats Heresies

The holy Hierarch Theodore resumed shepherding his reason-endowed flock. He overthrew heretical dogmas with both his wise writings and teachings. With great boldness, he openly anathematized the heresiarchs. The thrice-wretched ones, put to shame, became deeply incensed. They began ridiculing and reproaching the Orthodox when they chanted. Some of the impious ones, those who were Nestorians, blasphemed the Theotokos. Others, such as the Manichaeans, who confess two principals in the Godhead—one good and the other evil—and who worship the sun and the moon, talk nonsense about other blasphemous things. The like-minded heretics of Severos also despised Theodore, because he was possessed by the fervent zeal of Orthodox piety. They agreed among themselves to slay him and to destroy the cathedral. Nevertheless, God justly punished the unrighteous. Those that had lifted their hands to strike down the saint were unable to lower their hands, which became paralyzed and withered. Apart from them, those that sought to demolish the

church, upon entering, had their faces burned by a flame emerging from within that incapacitated them.

Since the conspirators were unsuccessful, they decided to make grief for the saint in the following manner. They confiscated Church properties, that is, country farms and estates that the faithful had donated. They then transferred these stationary properties, offering them as gifts to the emirs (Muslim princes) who dominated the cities of Syria. The saint witnessed their injustices and reasoned well to go before the king who had authority over all of Syria, to disclose to him the machinations of the heretics and to bring them to justice.

### King Mavias

"The holy hierarch then took me (the author of this present life), together with other priests and deacons, and we walked for many days. We came into Syria. The ruler, one Mavias, was noble-minded. Though he was a Hagarene, yet he was an honest judge who dealt favorably with the Christians because he admired their virtuous lives. Therefore, once we arrived, we went directly into the church. It was maintained in good order. We were gladly received by the metropolitan. It happened that there was also present in the church both the chief secretary and the chief physician of King Mavias. The two officials were both Orthodox Christians. They, together with the metropolitan, inquired politely into the nature of our business among them. The blessed Theodore explained our cause. Indeed, their hierarch greatly sympathized and besought the king's men if they might mention the matter of the Edessene Archbishop Theodore to the king." They however replied, "Now is not the time. For the king is suffering from a grave illness, which they call cancer. It is devouring his flesh. He is terminally ill. The worst thing about his disease is the effect it has on his eyes. He has been rendered blind. All the physicians are at a loss concerning his case. And, now, of late, he has contracted pneumonia. His death is certainly imminent."

Saint Theodore, after listening sympathetically to them describe the plight of their king, addressed them: "What say you, O sirs? Perhaps I can treat him with divine aid?" The court physician answered, "If thou wert to cure him, he would grant whatsoever gift thou shouldst request of him." Therefore, the chief physician went to the king and said, "The Bishop of Edessa is here, and he is a marvellous physician. Summon him that he might heal thee." The king then sent men to invite the saint. Theodore went forward, taking with him earth from the holy sepulcher of the Lord. Theodore proceeded to mix it with water from the holy lamps. He anointed the king's head, eyelids, heart, and forehead, invoking the name of Christ. He then ordered him to rest, and left him alone. When the king awoke, his illness was gone—O Thy wonders, almighty Christ King! The swelling and trauma had

disappeared. He recovered his sight, his high fever went down to a dewy coolness, and the pneumonia dissipated. He who was at the gates of death, and who was expected by all to have succumbed by the morning, now rose up in health.

When the king awoke to find this paradoxical phenomenon, he greatly marvelled that in but a moment he was completely healed of the disease. He gave as much thanks as he was able to the sacred physician and prepared a great feast out of his ineffable joy. All the leaders, the princes and many soldiers, were invited. After Mavias bestowed upon the wonder-working Theodore many precious and royal gifts, he asked him, "O man of God and light of mine eyes, what has brought thee here?" Then the saint explained his grievance. The king was exceedingly desirous to alleviate his benefactor's plight, so he sent men forthwith to the Emirate of Syria, and to Antioch, with letters of threats, demanding the following: (1) all the confiscated properties of the Church of Edessa were to be returned; and (2) if the heretics did not consent to become Orthodox, they were to be cast out of the city. To be sure that his orders were complied with, the king dispatched another emir to enforce whatever he had written. The king then turned to the hierarch and exclaimed, "Behold, I have done all that thou hast ordered! Therefore, send back thy company (synodia) with the emir, but thou must tarry here with thy nephew Basil,<sup>57</sup> that we might delight in each other's company." Consequently, three priests accompanied the emir. When they arrived in Edessa, the epistles were given to the chiefs of the heretics. When they read the king's command, most became frightened and chose to espouse Orthodoxy. Those who stubbornly refused were banished. Then all the Church properties were returned. Hence, the faithful of Edessa, filled with boundless joy and gladness, became one flock in Christ.

Meanwhile, one day, the king said to Archbishop Theodore, "My beloved friend, I do so desire that I should never be separated from thee in this life or in the future one." The saint remarked, "Within me I see an open door for thee. I am already inside; however, thou art standing outside and dost not wish to enter. Then, in but a short while, I see that the door will be shut and we shall be parted." The king then asked him to break down the door. The saint responded by reciting another parable in these words: "Two men went to a city to have a word with the king: one was poor and the other rich. The rich man strode upon a wide road, whereas the poor man tread a path both narrow and troublesome. The poor one then turned to the rich man and remarked: 'The day draws to a close. Soon the great doors of the city will be locked. Leave thy road and come here with me, for I know a small gate where the

<sup>57</sup> This nephew is also the Greek biographer: Bishop Basil of Emessa.

people may gain entrance at whatever hour they may arrive.' However, the rich man, upon considering the tight road that was strewn with hardships, preferred to stay on the path he was traveling. Nevertheless, night fell and the doors were shut. On the one hand, while the rich man waited outside the city walls with his entourage, they were devoured by wild beasts. The poor man, on the other hand, though he bore hardship during that journey, arrived shortly thereafter at the restricted entrance and was received within by the innkeeper where he found every comfort."

The saint then went on to relate a third parable: "If I should reveal to thee a fountain of immortality, which could restore thy youth and grant thee comeliness and deathlessness, canst thou imagine how much joy would be thine?" The king replied, "If this were so, believe me, all the good things that I possess I would make thee to share and have with me." Then the hierarch removed from inside his breast a Gospel, and said, "If thou wilt desire life everlasting and never to die, then this is the way to the door of Paradise, the path of life, the immortal source. And Who is the door, path, fountain, and eternal life? It is our Lord Jesus Christ, the only true God, Who created the cosmos. He is the everlasting King. If thou desirest to reign eternally, for a short while become the servant of Him Who is such a good and compassionate God. Leave thy hateful religion and the deceiver of the people, Mohammed, who is the forerunner of the Antichrist. Come to believe in Christ that thou mightest be vouchsafed blessedness."

With these exhortations and many other utterances did the all-wise Theodore exhort the king; and his words went straight to the king's heart. By the working of divine grace, Mavias' soul opened wide. The king besought the archbishop to read the Gospel to him, which request Theodore quickly obliged. After he read aloud for a time, he wrote down the Symbol of the Faith in the Saracen tongue. The king was then made a catechumen together with three of his trustworthy servants, youths all, whom he dearly loved with fatherly affection. Mavias then planned to make it appear that he would be going hunting with his company, and the saint and his nephew would be close by. When they arrived at the Tigris River, the king and his three servants withdrew from the hunting party. Then all six met, and the king was baptized in the name of the Holy Trinity, taking the name John, which Basil, the saint's nephew, gave him. Then the three noble-minded children were baptized. The first one was sponsored by the king, then he in turn sponsored the second, and Basil, the third. "Then we returned," records the biographer and nephew, "to the imperial palace. We entered a small chamber with a table. It was easily converted that the hierarch might secretly liturgize. We then partook of the divine Mysteries. The palace now had been transformed into a bright and

joyful place. Afterward, the venerable Theodore exhorted and advised all the newly-illumined."

### The Christians on Trial

It happened that many extraordinary and great signs appeared among King John's people. They beheld the casting out of demons and the healing of every incurable disease, which events had a twofold effect: the faithful were filled with joy, whereas the Jews and Ishmaelites were moved to envy. In particular there was a ruler of the synagogue, one versed in Hebrew Law and erudition. "Being misled by false reasoning, he was illogical and uttered many witless things when he saw our Church flourishing," comments Basil. Therefore, he went before the chief prosecutor and advised him to order a hearing, that the case concerning matters of belief between the Jews and Christians might be argued at the palace. Thereupon, the judges and the leading advocate, together with a crowd of Christians and Jews, assembled at the judgment hall of the king. The chief of the synagogue addressed the king, saying, "Before the tribunal of thine authority, we seek from thee a judgment between our two faiths. After thou hearest our arguments, uphold the truth and reject what is false by a righteous decision on thy part. It is for this that God has magnified the Persian rule, for He has given thee rule over Jerusalem and has put the Galileans under thy footstool. On account of this, I beseech thee to bear with us. I ask thee to hear the case and pronounce thy most just judgment." Then the useless one began to rail and to utter blasphemies against Christ, by making unsound statements. Then the ruler of the synagogue turned to the archbishop and said, "Art thou not the head of the Christians?" The blessed Theodore answered, "Yes." Then the Jew turned to the king and declared, "Let him, therefore, defend himself before me." Then Basil interrupted and said, "Thou art not worthy, O unclean and profane one, even to hear the saint; for he shall liturgize this day, but I, his disciple, will answer thee."

Then the Jew, putting his trust in the bribes he had given to the advocate, did not argue his point by bringing forth as a witness any scriptural passages. But rather, the thrice-accursed one commenced to utter boastful and blasphemous words against the Christians. The evil serpent, who was his teacher, attempted to overturn the faith of the king. But the great Theodore, filled with the Holy Spirit, did not leave the Jew to continue much further. The archbishop commanded him to keep silence, saying to him, "If thou dost wish to mention the Mosaic Law or other sayings of the prophets, O unlearned one, we can solve the problems. But since thou knowest not one wise word or verse, but only knowest to utter the blasphemies that thy father the devil interprets for thee, from this very hour thou shalt be rendered speechless. This is because thou speakest unlawfully and vainly against the righteous One,

Christ." Consequently, the former babbler and boaster became dumb and speechless. The Jews, as a result, were brought to shame. Many of them, together with the Saracens and Persians, came to believe in Christ after witnessing this spectacle. The king was angered against the blaspheming Jew and ordered that he be beaten with bullwhips and cast into prison. The remainder of the Jews present suffered a beating. Following this, they were driven from the judgment hall. As for the chief advocate, who was not without blame, he was justly condemned for his collaboration with that Jew. The king then rejoiced in spirit at this miracle, which caused him to become more firmly confirmed in the Orthodox Faith of Christ.

After three days in prison, the Jew came to his senses and acknowledged his deception. This came about when the all-merciful God put a drop of His compassion into his heart. Therefore, the Jew sent a note to the great Theodore, wherein he promised to become a Christian and to seek forgiveness. He was then released from prison and prostrated himself before the feet of the archbishop. Since he still could not speak, he, after many gesticulations, motioned that he wished holy Baptism. Thus, it was performed. He was made a son of light, freed from darkness, and named Simon. When he emerged from the baptismal font, divine grace descended upon him. He was enabled to open his mouth and speak. Thereupon, he began to glorify our Lord Jesus Christ and His unoriginate Father and the life-creating Spirit. The bystanders were very amazed at this. The king learned of the event and summoned Simon. Perceiving that the former synagogue chief truly did believe, he bestowed upon him many favors.

### **King John's Confidential Disclosure to Archbishop Theodore**

It was now winter, and King John secretly took the great Theodore into his chamber and said, "My soul is afraid, O spiritual father, when I remember death. Perhaps, it will come upon me suddenly. Then, like a fruitless tree that is to be cut down, I shall be—God forbid!—cast into the unquenchable fire as one slothful and unfruitful. Since I became a Christian, by God's help and thine own encouragement, my soul ceases not to remind me that I am only a Christian in secret. But before the end, that I might receive a beloved death, I should like to confess and make manifest my Master. Therefore, strengthen and arm me by thy prayers and teachings. I also ask thee to take much gold and distribute it, both at the Church of the Holy Sepulcher and in the monasteries, among the poor hermits and other indigent folk. After thou shouldest perform this ministry for me, return to thy church. If, at that time, thou shouldest hear that by divine grace I am still alive, do thou come and find me. However, if thou shouldest learn that I have reposed, do thou not come; instead, commemorate me in the divine Liturgy. Yea, I entreat thine episcopacy, O holy father: do not forget thy child."

Saint Theodore, beginning to weep and sigh, said to the king, "I pray the best for thee, O blest king. I perceive very well the matter and that thou holdest temporal things in contempt as inconstant and vain. I understand thy wish to provide for the future everlasting life. Therefore, rejoice and be glad, for great will be thy reward and rich thy retribution in the heavens. Indeed, I will do as thou hast bidden me. Thou hast put all thy hope in the Master Christ Who has enlightened thee and given thee life, since thou wert formerly dead in thy sins. Therefore, love Him with all thy heart, soul, and strength,<sup>58</sup> for He, the most compassionate One, loved us and was crucified for us. Also, the divine Paul teaches us: 'Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall affliction, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword [Rom. 8:35]?' These, O beloved, are the promises. Therefore, for our salvation, we do not cower before these present torments. But let us patiently wait upon our Master for all things, that we might be vouchsafed His kingdom and ever possess unutterable glory and delight."

Upon hearing these words, the king's soul was replete with spiritual delight and joy. After the one embraced the other, the saint blessed the king. They, then, bid each other farewell with tears of joy. King John presented to him many gifts: ten staters<sup>59</sup> of gold, twenty pieces of pure silver, other gold treasures and liturgical vessels including chalices and censers. He also gave him many precious stones that were worth a hundred times more than the gold. The king also supplied him with gold embroidered vestments and many other rich gifts. He furnished all these things abundantly, with a warm heart and an open hand, that he might find them in Paradise. John told Theodore to keep whatever he required for the Bishopric of Edessa. In the event anything remained, he was to donate the excess to the Church of the Resurrection and



Saint John

<sup>58</sup> Mk. 12:30; Lk. 10:27.

<sup>59</sup> A stater was an Attic silver coin, equal to four drachmae (two didrachmas) or one shekel. Cf. Mt. 17:27.

to monastery churches. The saint and his nephew were provided with a military escort should they encounter robbers on the road. Therefore, they left Babylon at night and headed straight for Edessa. Then they repaired to Jerusalem where the gifts of the king were distributed, in accordance with his holy command, to the churches and the monasteries. Consequently, many churches were enriched and the monasteries were revived by the charity of the blessed king.



*The Holy Three Youths*

### **The Martyrdom of King John the Persian and the Holy Three Youths**

When the king learned that all that he had donated was distributed as he desired, he made the excellent decision to seal his life with martyrdom. But first, he secretly dispensed the remainder of his wealth—as much as he was able—not only to the poor Christians but also to the metropolitan. The latter received an almost immeasurable sum for distribution according to the prelate's discretion. Afterward, John summoned his princes and addressed them, "Within a few days, I shall depart this life. Therefore, tomorrow, all of you will assemble on the plain that I may disclose my last will and testament." Messengers were sent to gather everyone into the hippodrome. All that night the king prayed and wept. Then, in the morning, before everyone awoke, he had a priest perform the divine Liturgy in the outer room of his royal chamber. John and the three youths received holy Communion. The king then mounted his finest steed and left the palace splendidly dressed to meet the people. Just as he had commanded, many people were assembled, that is Persians, Ishmaelites, Jews, and even pious Christians. He then ascended the highest point that all might hear his speech.

When the crowd had hushed, King John rose up from his throne. In a great voice, the ever-memorable one began to say, "Hearken to me, O Persians, Hagarenes, Jews, and you elect people of Christ: I am a Christian and my name is John. I believe in the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the

trihypostatic unity of the Godhead. No other religion has the truth save this. For as my Lord Jesus Christ said, 'Everyone therefore who shall confess in Me before men, I also will confess in him before My Father Who is in the heavens. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Who is in the heavens [Mt. 10:32, 33].' Therefore, I confess Him before heaven and earth, and before angels and men." The king then removed from his breast a precious cross. It was made of solid gold and precious stones. He then elevated it toward the east and venerated it three times and kissed it, saying, "Thy Cross, do I venerate, O Christ, the precious. Thee I know as my God and Lord and Savior, and to Thee do I attribute glory, together with Thy Father and the all-holy and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen. Together with me, these three children also confess the same belief."

When the crowd heard these words, they were startled and jumped to their feet marvelling. Afterward, the devil incited the infidels. They rushed upon the king with knives to slay him. As for the believing three children, they underwent much for many hours until, being called by God, the thrice-blessed ones were slain. After this, the Christ-haters, further struck the king with swords and spears. Still alive, he rejoiced in his wounds and uttered, "Lord, into Thy hands I command my spirit."<sup>60</sup> Thus was the blessed John translated from this earthly and temporal kingdom to the one that is heavenly and everlasting, that he might reign eternally with the immortal King. He suffered martyrdom on the 30<sup>th</sup> day of the month of May. Nevertheless, his murderers were still not sated with his death, but broke and cut his body. When the Christians beheld such savagery, they feared and fled. The martyr's relics were cast down and kept under guard lest the Christians should take them up and bury them.

The following night, the holy martyr appeared to the chief satrap (governor) of the city and angrily threatened him, "Give my body to the metropolitan of the Christians, to bury it that I not slay thee straightway!" When the satrap awoke, in fear he related the vision to another. He put aside all other business and besought the metropolitan to collect the relics. Thus, a bishop was sent to bring them to him. Afterward, the relics of the three children were also taken and buried in a church. The faithful glorify and thank the Lord Who has shown many signs and wonders at the tomb of the king and the three children. In consequence of these wonderworkings, many of the Persians and Hagarenes were baptized when they witnessed great miracles—one after the other.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. Lk. 23:46.

## Saint Theodore's Final Years

On one occasion, the sublime Theodore disclosed his acts of asceticism and hardships. He ate only once a week and remained in prayer all night. Therefore, the Master Christ wrought through him many miracles of healing by the richness of His grace. Crowds of sick people from all over Syria came to Theodore, and he healed them in but a moment of time. He utilized no herbs and he charged no fees. These miracles were witnessed to by the Ishmaelites, who also came to believe in Christ. Hence, gradually, the ranks of the faithful increased while those of the impious diminished. Thus did the great Theodore pass his life and enlighten all with his divine accomplishments and his rivers of miracles. Three years after King John's martyric struggle, the time for the venerable hierarch arrived to go to his much-desired Lord. He knew beforehand of his repose, so he assembled his reason-endowed sheep, both the priests and the faithful, and exhorted them in this wise: to stand firmly established in Orthodoxy, to love one another and to be at peace, and, simply, to keep all the commandments of the Lord that they might find life eternal.

Theodore, after delivering these soul-saving counsels, embraced them and bade them farewell. The blessed one then departed for Jerusalem. He went to the Church of the Resurrection, where he prayed and soaked the ground with his tears. Together with the holy sepulcher, he visited and venerated all the other holy places. He embraced the shrines with tears. He next repaired to the Lavra of Saint Savvas, where he sojourned for three weeks inside the cave which he formerly inhabited. Also, at the lavra, he edified the brotherhood with his godly words. Not much time passed before he grew ill. He partook of the heavenly Mysteries and said, "Lord, into Thy hands I commend my spirit." On the 19<sup>th</sup> day of the month of July, he reposed. Straightway, his soul was taken up into the heavens. His bodily remains were interred nearby his kinsman, the holy Martyr Michael. Indeed, even after his repose, many miracles were wrought at the site of Saint Theodore's tomb, to the glory and praise of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all honor and worship, together with the Holy Spirit, both now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

### On the 19<sup>th</sup> of July, the holy Church commemorates our venerable Father DIOCLES the Anchorite of Egypt.<sup>61</sup>

Diocles (Diokles) was a man of knowledge, understanding, and learning. This is how the goodly Abba Dorotheos the priest, who lived in a

<sup>61</sup> See Palladius, who wrote in 419 and 420, "The Monks of Antinoë," *The Lausiac History*, § 58; *The Paradise of the Fathers*, translated by Ernest A. Wallis Budge, Volume I (Seattle, WA: Saint Nectarios Press, 1978, repr.).