

The Orthodox Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross, Lancaster

Meeting at the Chaplaincy Centre of Lancaster University

Newsletter



*Ἐθρονος Χριστός, Ζωοδότης.
(Φ. Κόντογλου, 1962)*

*The Parish of the Holy and Life-Giving Cross,
belongs to the Antiochian Orthodox Deanery of the United Kingdom and Ireland,
which is part of the Antiochian Orthodox Archdiocese of Western and Central Europe.*

Our Metropolitan is His Eminence Archbishop John.

The Patriarchate of Antioch is third senior of the Orthodox Churches.

The Patriarch is His Beatitude Ignatius IV.

*The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch
(Acts 11:26)*

ST. NICHOLAS PLANAS

The holy Saint Nicholas (Planas) of Athens (1851-1932) was officially glorified as a saint by the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in 1992. He was born in 1851 on the island of Naxos in Greece and is often referred to as Papa Nicholas. His feast day is celebrated on March 2, except when it falls during Great Lent period; then it is celebrated on the first Sunday following March 2.

Father Nicholas liturgised daily for fifty consecutive years from 8am till 2pm, in snows, in revolutions. Not even with the invasion of the Anglo-French in 1917 did he interrupt his series of Liturgies. In the narrow streets of the Acropolis at 2pm in the afternoon in July, he would liturgise in small chapels, as the sweat settled on the sacred vestments of this true labourer in Christ's vineyard.



The interior of the church of Aghios Ioannis (St. John).

As a confessor he was not strict about fasting, though when it concerned himself, he was very strict. One day someone gave him a little chocolate and told him it was fastworthy. He took it in his hand, looked at it closely and said, "Just to be sure, take it back!"

He commemorated names for whole hours. First, departed patriarchs, metropolitans, priests, deacons, the... Naxiotes (people from Naxos) and the Athenians.

The names they gave him, he commemorated for many months. Every now and then his spiritual children, to give him some rest, would take the old papers and secretly rip them up, because he took them with him to all the churches. He would place them in two large handkerchiefs and tie them up like a type of package, and place them on his hip. When he would arrive home and take them off his hip -because he had two packages, one with names and the other with holy relics- they would ask him, "What are these packages?" and he would respond "My bills and my contracts". "Aren't you tired, Father? When will you rest?" He would cross his hands and humbly respond, "I shall chant to my God as long as I live."



The reliquary with the relics of the Saint.

When he would go into church, a stir would occur from the reception people would give him. Some would kiss his hands, others his cassock, others his little head since he was short. Most of the time he liturgised in the church of the Prophet. On feast days he would go to his own parish. In the church of Aghios Ioannis (St. John) there was a caretaker who disliked the elder. One day she swore at him with hand gestures, and at night she saw Saint John saying to her, "What did my servant do to you that you would swear at him like that?" And he gave her a slap on the cheek. In the morning her cheek was black and blue.

The next day when Fr. Nicholas went to church the caretaker went in front of him, fell at his feet, asked his forgiveness, and simultaneously asked him to step on her hands. The meek and calm one went off to one side. She shouted, "Step on them, Father!" and again he responded, "But why should I step on them?"; this lasted quite a while until he forgave her for what she had done, even though he had not noticed it.



His patience and forbearance were unlimited. He had a helper, Michael, who always accompanied him and chanted if no one else was there. Even though he loved the elder a lot, at the same time he tormented him. On freezing days of winter when he was forced to be near Fr. Nicholas, while he commemorated for unending hours, Michael would shout "Come o-o-on, Father-er-er-er! You are looking to take the dead out of hades and bury us with the cold..." Another time, he did not allow him to do a supplication service to the Theotokos at the end of the Liturgy. Father Nicholas was pout-faced all day and would say to himself, "Imagine Michael not allowing me to do a supplication service!..." and he would repeat again, "Imagine, he wouldn't allow me". When sometimes they argued in church, the elder would hide in the altar so as not to take part. And once he was advising one of his spiritual children on how to restrain her anger, and would say, "Do you think, my child, that I don't know

how to speak out? I know but I think of the result".

The children who were in church would see him shining with heavenly light, doing unexplainable gestures, or remaining for a long time attentive, as if something were happening to him. There were the moments when he was communicating with the saints and being drenched with the light of Paradise. Many times they would see him not standing on the ground. A little eight year old child once came out white from the altar and told his mother "Mo-o-om, Father Nicholas is this high off the ground" and he showed her with his hand a half cubit above the ground. "Don't be afraid, my child, all priests are elevated off the ground that way when they liturgise" his mother responded, doing her cross to settle him down.

The children would see him being elevated to the sky and not stepping upon the ground, because he scorned all earthly and material things. His mind was high up, on Him Who He worshipped, and he would not turn his eyes to look at what the people call material goods.

Once some for whom he had read a supplication service gave him a respectable sum of money in a sealed envelope. He gave it away immediately, still sealed, to a poor woman. The man who gave it to him got upset and said, "Why, that blessed one, wouldn't he even look at what I gave him?"

He told a spiritual daughter of his that he had cut a payment to eleven families of widows and orphans, and furthermore, he said, the young widows especially have need, because poverty urges them to corruption.

A lot of money would pass through his hands, but he would keep nothing. He would immediately give it away to

charity. Many times he remained without even a penny for himself. Once he took a horse and carriage to take him somewhere, without noticing that he did not have any money. The carriage driver said to him, "Aren't you the parish priest of St. John's, Father Nicholas?" "Yes, my child, I am." "Well, I don't want money, just your blessing!"

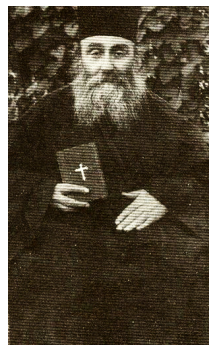
Another time some people were discussing politics at a certain house. "So, what do you say, Father?" they asked him. Once he recovered from the depth of his thought, he wanted to say something, "Who is governing now?". Imagine how little knowledge he had of secular matters.

Once he set out on his own to go to a chapel in Peristeri, but he lost his way. He advanced, distressed and praying, without knowing where he was going, until he saw a young lad in front of him, saying to him, "Did you lose your way, Father? I will guide you". The young lad went in front and Father Nicholas went behind, and they reached the door of the church. Here he, himself, relates what happened: "As soon as we reached outside the door, I turned to give him thanks, and immediately he shone brilliantly, and I lost him".

When he liturgised, he wanted everything to contribute to the majesty of the Divine Liturgy. He chanted with such contrition that he would hear the angels chanting with him. Once, he asked a spiritual daughter of his whether she also heard the angels. "No, my Father, I don't hear them." Immediately he repented and said to himself, "I shouldn't have said it, I shouldn't have said it..."

For the duration of the half century in which he liturgised without a break, he never lacked prosphoro (holy bread used for the Holy Liturgy). Always some woman would bring it the night before

or some nearby bakery would provide it for him. One day the Matins had proceeded quite a way and no prosphoro could be seen anywhere. He sent helpers to go to the women he knew always had prosphoro; he looked in the cupboards of the sanctuary, nothing. He was distressed to the point that he started to cry. After such a continuance of liturgies for a cessation to occur now! Whereupon they saw him coming out of the Holy Royal Doors holding a prosphoro (the Seal only, not the whole loaf), which was still very warm and which he had found on the altar table. Moved with joy, he said, "My children, what a sign God did for me!" All miracles he called signs. He did not delve too deeply into these phenomena; he considered them natural, out of his great faith. And he did not comment very much about them, so as not to put on himself.



Photograph of St. Nicholas Planas

One night, the eve of the feast of the Holy Hieromartyr Phocas was dawning. One of his spiritual children saw a majestic priest behind Father Nicholas, who was observing how they were chanting the Holy Divine Liturgy. When she mentioned this to the elder, he said to her, bringing his finger to his lips, "Shhh! It is the Hieromartyr Phocas".

Father Nicholas knew how to censure, to correct, to enlighten souls, without rhetorical sermons, but merely with his life, his presence. A rich woman got sick, and her cousin suggested that they bring Father Nicholas to read a prayer for health. The daughter of the sick woman liked external propriety. So she said "Let's bring a more respectable looking priest from the bigger churches, and not him, who will be dusty from church," etc. That night she saw Fr. Nicholas in her sleep, with all gold vestments, saying to her, "Do I please you, my child?" Startled, she awoke and strove to call father to read a prayer for health. When he came, the daughter of the sick woman ran piously, and she knelt down to kiss his hand, he said to her, "Did I please you as you saw me, my child?" Awe and astonishment rushed all through her body. Never did she expect such a rebuke for her vanity.

Yet one other incident reveals the unsurpassed faith and piety which he had in the performance of his sacred duties. He went one day to commune a leper, but the illness had destroyed his lips so much that he could not take the Holy Body of the Lord, and it fell a little to the side of his mouth. Without hesitation, Father knelt and took the Divine Pearl which had fallen, and consumed It! Those who have a difficult time consuming because they fear germs should see this!! What a blasphemy! The irrational thoughts of darkened unbelievers...

In the various churches where he celebrated he was the consolation and refuge of people. He was the "sacred little elder" who comforted every human pain. His reputation had extended to the various eparchies also, and people hastened from everywhere to hear him liturgise, to kiss his hand, for him to bless them... He reached 84 years of age and had never

been slandered once, nor did anyone say anything against him. Everyone knew him and respected his holy personality. When he passed by they greeted him, taking off their hats.

On March 2, 1932, however, his holy life reached its end. He liturgised for the last time on the Sunday of the Prodigal Son. As soon as he consumed the Holy Cup, he suffered a light fainting and was transported home, where his son John, and his daughter-in-law, Marigoula, offered their last services to their holy father. Like a little bird he gave up his holy soul to Him Whom he had worshipped his whole life long. News of the grievous event spread to all of Athens. People ran to venerate the relic of the venerable elder. Everyone wanted to kiss his hand for the last time. The Archbishop of Athens, Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, suggested that the burial take place at night so that everyone could embrace him. Thus it happened.



The exterior of the church of Aghios Ioannis.

His body was buried in the courtyard of the church of St. John. His bones were placed in a silver reliquary in the new majestic church of St. John. His whole life was proof of the divine power and wisdom which God the Creator grants to those who love Him and keep His commandments.

For this reason the noted writers, Alexandros Papadiamantis and Alexan-

dros Moraitidis, attached themselves to the disciples of the uneducated but wise priest (they would always chant near Father Nicholas). For this reason great spiritual names such as the Abbot of the Sacred Monastery of Longovarda, Paros, Archimandrite Zervakos, praised him.

With a special Synodical Deed, the Patriarchate numbered him in the listing of Saints of the Orthodox Church, and appointed that his memory be celebrated on March 2nd. The holy Canonisation of Fr. Nicholas Planas took place in 1992.

Kontakion (Tone 3)

Humble of spirit and pure of heart, illustrious in life and dispassionate of a truth, wast thou, O wise one. Thou didst illumine all by the virtues and dost grant grace unto them that draw nigh unto thee; and by thine intercessions, thou dost heal them that call upon thee, O Father Nicholas.

Megalynarion

As a simple shepherd of Christ God's lambs, thou didst tend thy flock well on the pasture of piety, nourishing their spirits with ceaseless supplications and leading them to Christ, O wise Father Nicholas.

Source: <http://fr-d-serfes.org/lives/stnicholas.htm>

LITURGIES THIS MONTH

Sunday 8th in Quiet Room at 10.00 a.m.
followed by Lunch

Saturday 14th in R.C. Chapel at 10.00 a.m.

Saturday 21st in R.C. Chapel at 10.00 a.m.

Saturday 28th in R.C. Chapel at 10.00 a.m.

Akathists will be served on the Fridays of Great Lent, except April the 3rd.

PRAYERS

For health and salvation:

Paraskevi

Marios

Panagiota

Ian

Konstantinos

†Reposed:

Joan

Ioannis

Protopresbyter Alban

Georgianna (one year anniversary)

ST. THEODORA OF SERVIA EMPRESS OF ARTA

Aghia Theodora (St. Theodora) the empress of Arta comes from my hometown Sérvia at the Northwest of Greece. She was married to Michael II Komnenos Doukas the emperor of Epirus and she was a rare example of late Byzantine female Saint. She is thought to have been born about 1225 and she is called Theodora the Righteous.

As a woman who entered monastic life after being widowed, Theodora resembles Athanasia of Aegina and Theodora of Thessaloniki; like Matrona, Thomais of Lesbos and Mary the Younger, she suffered abuse at the hands of her husband. In none of these cases was marriage a hindrance to attaining sanctity. Theodora's most distinguishing feature was her noble endurance of her five-year exile from Arta with no complaint although she, a former empress, was reduced to picking wild greens in the fields. After her reconciliation with her husband, she founded a convent in Arta and adorned

the church with offerings. Asceticism, charity, foreknowledge of her death, and the miraculous posthumous cures at her tomb, are described by her hagiographer as her attributes of sanctity.



The Church of Aghia Theodora in Arta. Built in the 11th century as a church of Aghios Georgios, extended around 1270 by Theodora who lived there, in the monastery, after the death of her husband. The tomb of Aghia Theodora is located in front of the church.

The story of her life evidently evinced a sympathetic and admiring response among the people of Arta and Sérvia, for her tomb began to attract popular veneration soon after her death and continues to do so to the present day. Her memory is celebrated on the 11th of March.

Thodoris Papadopoulos

KOLLIVA RECIPE

Kolliva is the offering we make to be blessed on memorial services. The tradition is that the people eat the sweet wheat berry mixture and in return they wish "May God forgive their souls".

The kolliva ingredients and their quantities vary, according to the number of people, the country, the region, the ingredients available. The basis is wheat

berries, a seed symbolising the hope of new life: "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). Once it has been mixed with fruits, nuts, and honey, the concoction is heaped on a platter and shaped into a mound. It is then covered with white powdered sugar to symbolize purity - the state of the soul newly received into Heaven. Candy and fruit decorations mark the kolliva with a cross.

Various ingredients can be added to the wheat: honey or sugar for spiritual sweetness, pomegranate seeds, a symbol of resurrection, parsley (a symbol of the green pastures of Eternal Rest maybe?), etc.

To make:

Pick and rinse the wheat berries (available at health food shops). If you soak overnight (in cold water) you will minimise cooking time the next day, but if you forget it's ok, it'll just take longer. Boil the wheat until well cooked but still whole and chewy. Drain and leave in the colander until completely cool. Mix with any (or all) of the following:

- i) Walnuts, almonds, sesame, or any nuts and seeds available. They can be whole, chopped or slivered, raw or toasted (better flavour).
- ii) Raisins, sultanas, currants or a mixture. I like adding them (after washing them well) to the wheat just before I drain it, so that the heat plumps up and softens the fruit.
- iii) Cinnamon for extra flavour. Father Jonathan successfully uses lemon zest and coconut for both flavour and decoration (pictured).
- iv) Pomegranate seeds and chopped parsley (I prefer flat leaf).

v) Honey or sugar, to taste (I prefer them not too sweet, remember, the dried fruit will impart their own sweetness).

Mix all the ingredients, form a mound on a platter, or put in a bowl. If you decorate with icing sugar it's better if you first cover with a layer of fine dried bread crumbs (in Greece they call it galleta) to prevent the mixture soaking through the sugar. Make a cross on top with one or some of the ingredients (nuts, cinnamon, pomegranate) or the special silver candy decorations you can find in the baking ingredients section of a supermarket.

pieceofcake



MAJOR CELEBRATIONS THIS MONTH

2nd Mar: Clean Monday (First Monday in Lent), St. Nicholas Planas and St. Joachim of Ithaca

6th Mar: Finding of the precious Cross by St. Helen

8th Mar: Sunday of Orthodoxy

17th Mar: St. Patrick the enlightener of Ireland

20th Mar: St. Cuthbert the Wonderworker, Bishop of Lindisfarne

20th Mar: St. Tikhon, Patriarch of Moscow

25th Mar: The Annunciation of the Theotokos

30th Mar: St. John Climacus the righteous, author of the Divine Ladder of Ascent

For the lives of Saints please visit the Calendar of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America: www.calendar.goarch.org

“We have been called to become unknown heroes,
visible only to the unsleeping eye of God”
- Elder Ephraim -



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