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to time and again: “Look down upon me a sinner, thine unprofitable servant...” is the Cherubic Prayer of the priest. Every “Lord have mercy” in the Liturgy speaks this truth. One can think of St. Peter. It was Peter, being astounded at the shore that the nets are suddenly filled with fish, thus realizing that he was standing before the living God in Christ, who falls to his knees and cries, “Depart from me, O Lord, for I am a *sinner*.”

It is only after that, that Our Lord says, “Now, I will make you a fisher of men!” One wonders, what does his sinfulness have to do with the nets suddenly being filled? Why should St. Peter say that? The relationship becomes clear when we realize that the *act* of being a disciple of Christ follows one’s awareness of his own limitedness and sinfulness. The psalmist knew this of old when he sang — and as the priest prays while he censes before the Great Entrance, Psalm 50, “...for in sin was I conceived, and in sin did my mother conceive me...”

St. Ephraim’s Prayer says all that. Our Christian behavior — our act and lives with each other — begins within the humility of one’s own soul.

Author Unknown

MARCH 31 – REPOSE OF SAINT INNOCENT

Born on August 26, 1797, in a remote village in Siberia, John Popov (who later assumed the surname of Veniaminov) studies for pastoral service at the seminary in Irkutsk. After his marriage to Catherine Sharina



(1817) and ordination to the priesthood (1821), Fr. John volunteered for missionary work in Alaska.

Arriving with his family in Unalaska in the Aleutian island chain (1824), Fr. John began his remarkable career as a missionary priest and bishop in the far-reaches of the Russian Empire — Siberia and Alaska. Following the death of his wife (1839), he entered monastic life by taking the name Innocent and was elected the first resident bishop of Alaska (1840-58).

A person with many skills and interest, Fr. John carefully studied the traditional cultures of his flock and well as their natural environment. He also designed and built churches including the Mission House and St. Michael’s Cathedral in Sitka. House and St. Michael’s Cathedral in Sitka.

An accomplished linguist, Fr. John learned the various native Siberian and Alaskan languages of his diverse flock. While serving in Unalaska, he learned Unangan, the Fox Island dialect of the Aleut people. Along with Aleut leader Ivan Pankov, he devised a written grammar and alphabet, translating the Gospel of St. Matthew and liturgical texts. His spiritual treatise *Indication of the Pathway into the Kingdom of Heaven* was first published in Unangan and was the first Aleut book.

Later in his life he was appointed Metropolitan of Moscow (1868). However, Metropolitan Innocent’s evangelical zeal never diminished — establishing in 1868 the Orthodox Missionary Society. He died in Moscow on March 31, 1879, and was canonized a saint of the Orthodox Church on October 6, 1977.

Go Forth

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THE DEPTHS OF SAINT EPHRAIM’S PRAYER

*O LORD AND MASTER OF MY
LIFE:
TAKE FROM ME THE SPIRIT
OF SLOTH, DESPAIR, LUST OF
POWER AND IDLE TALK.*

*BUT GRANT RATHER THE
SPIRIT OF
CHASTITY, HUMILITY,
PATIENCE AND
LOVE TO YOUR SERVANT.*

*YEA, O LORD AND KING,
GRANT ME TO
SEE MY OWN SINS AND NOT
TO JUDGE
MY BROTHER, FOR YOU ARE
BLESSED
UNTO AGES OF AGES. AMEN.*

This prayer of repentance is read throughout the entire Orthodox world during Great Lent, itself a time of repentance. It formulates in three thoughts and sentences, the true essence of the Scripture, the teaching and piety of the Orthodox Faith.

Simply said, in the eyes of the Church, it tells of our desire as dependent children upon God, to have removed from us the wrong things, e.g., laziness, love of power and vain talk; secondly, to give to us the correct things, e.g., humility, patience and love.

THE ACCUSER OF THE PRAYER

Those are easy enough for any Christian to understand. But the third major statement is the *catcher* and the *accuser*: “That I may see my own sins and judge not my brother.”

As the Fathers of our Church have always known, these two are connected, that is, first, knowing my own transgressions and then, secondly, judging not my brother.

It is to this third concept of the prayer that our attention must turn. This is true because it is at that point where we, so to speak, must truly do our Christian “work” — knowing ourselves, our own humanity, so that we may not judge. In a certain sense, this requires of us a great struggle and suffering within ourselves, because to truly know oneself is painful — and to

thus not judge others, which we are only too ready to do, is painful.

Come with the following thoughts, if you will, that we may attempt to discover exactly what is needed to live *after* the injunction of that third concept.

First of all, one who is cut off — truncated — from his own depths, from his own humanity, is one who remains cut off from the suffering, the guilt and the aloneness of his brother. The heart of all Christian behavior begins, not in the dynamics among the people, but within one’s own soul, from which such acts proceed. St. Ephraim’s Prayer indicates this truth. But then, it is a truth referred



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Go Forth...and teach all nations. (Matthew 28:19)

APRIL 4 - SAINT NIKITA THE ALBANIAN

When we pray for the suffering Orthodox people in the world, we often forget about our brothers and sisters in Albania. Yet, they have suffered greatly for our Saviour, and they are still suffering today. Perhaps the life of the holy martyr Nikita will remind us of them, and we will begin to pray for the much-suffering Orthodox Christians of Albania, hoping that they also pray for us.

When he was still a young boy in Albania, our holy father Nikita desired to become a monk. As soon as he was old enough to grow a beard, the Christ loving youth set out for the Holy Mountain. There, he came to the monastery of St. Panteleimon and begged the abbot to accept him.

St. Nikita was a very strict faster and he soon became known for his struggles. Moreover, he was greatly admired for his wisdom and understanding of the Divine Scripture, and he was soon ordained a presbyter. After some years, the saint became worried that he would fall into pride because of the praises everyone was giving him, so he asked his elder for a blessing to go away and live alone. St. Nikita went to the lonely cells of the Skete of St. Anne and there he struggled for a long time in fasting and prayer.

At length, the holy priest felt a great desire to go forth and preach the Gospel of our Saviour to the

faithful and also to those who did not believe. "Perhaps," he thought, "God will even grant me to become a martyr for Christ's sake." The saint told his elder of his longing to be a missionary and to suffer martyrdom for Christ's sake. The elder gave his blessing and St. Nikita set out with great love and humility.

When St. Nikita came to the town of Serres, he went to the monastery hostel for vespers. It was holy week and the saint wanted to have Holy Communion. He went to the abbot of the hostel for confession, and told him of his desire to witness for Christ and to become a holy martyr if God so willed. "Let it be according to God's will," the abbot said. Having received Holy Communion, the saint set out and visited other churches in the city. He also went to the Church of the Divine Wisdom, which the Turks had taken away from the Orthodox people and turned into a Moslem mosque. As he entered the mosque, he saw a crippled Moslem man sitting near the door. The saint was moved by compassion for the poor man, came over to him and said, "Do you wish to be healed?"

"Of course," the man answered. "But that is not possible." The saint looked at him tenderly and said:

"You can be healed if you will do as I say. Believe in Jesus Christ as the one true God, and be baptized

into His Holy Orthodox Church, and I promise you that you will be completely healed."

When the crippled man heard this, he made his way to the chief teacher of the mosque and told him about the Orthodox monk who had tried to convert him. The chief of the mosque quickly sent men to arrest the saint. When the saint was brought in, the chief teacher asked him: "What is it that you were teaching to this Moslem? It is against the law for you to teach Moslems about Jesus Christ."

At that, St. Nikita began to speak about Christ. He explained how Christ was truly God, and how He loves us so much that He came to earth to save us from the power of Satan and death.

When he heard all these words, the chief of the mosque sent St. Nikita to the governor of the city. The governor asked the saint, "Why are you teaching people to believe in Christ? Why are you speaking against the Moslem religion?" Saint Nikita again told them all about Christ and His holy Orthodox Church. He also explained to them why the Moslem religion is false. The governor of the city, when he heard all this, sent St. Nikita to



the ruler. The ruler asked the saint all the same questions, and then he said:

"It is forbidden for you to teach anyone about Christ. I will have to put you into prison and decide what to do with you later."

Saint Nikita was taken to the prison, and the guards began to torture him. They hoped they could force him to renounce Christ, and so they beat him cruelly, burned his body with hot irons and tortured him in many other terrible ways.

But the saint only gave glory to God and prayed.

Finally, the ruler, seeing that the more he was tortured, the stronger the saint grew, ordered that Nikita be hanged. Our holy father Nikita was martyred in the evening of Great Holy Saturday. His sacred relics were left hanging in the public square in the sun for a whole week, but they did not show any signs of decay. After several days, the Orthodox people were allowed to take the holy relics and bury them. Many miracles were worked through the saint's relics and prayers.

Through his holy prayers, may we also find courage to stand firm in the Orthodox faith and expose the falsehood of this world. Amen!

From Lives of Saints for Young People, Volume 9. Fr. Lazar Puhalo. Synaxis Press, Chilliwack, B.C.