

Baptism and Water (Part One)

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On August 19th the Church celebrates the memory of the Holy Martyr Andrew Stratelates.

The word "stratelates" denotes a military commander, and Andrew was indeed a high-ranking and trusted member of the Roman army, serving in his native country of Syria. He was a secret Christian who, like many others, had not yet received baptism. He urged his soldiers to call on Jesus Christ as they entered into battle, and encouraged them as they faced war's terrors.

When Andrew returned to Antioch in triumph after a victory over the mighty Persian forces, his unconcealed allegiance to Jesus Christ got him into trouble. Another officer, jealous of his popularity and growing renown, denounced him as a Christian. The local governor arrested Andrew and put him on trial, but even under torture the young soldier would not deny his faith.

The governor did not know what to do with a returning soldier whose success made him a favorite of the crowds, but who refused to honor the gods. He wrote to the central government in Rome, and was instructed to set Andrew free, and then wait until the excitement over his victories had died down. When time had passed, the governor was to find some pretext other than religion to arrest him.

Informed by a friend of the governor's plans, Andrew knew there was a good chance he would die for his faith sooner or later; the governor would eventually condemn him, though not immediately. He also knew that even if the reason given for his arrest was some trumped-up charge, his Christian faith would be the real reason. It was time to commit himself to Christ, to show that his faith was worth dying for. He and several companions went to Tarsus and were baptized by the local bishop.

Now, with such a publicly defiant act, they were truly religious enemies of the state, and the authorities pursued them, just as Andrew had been sure they would. The group retreated into remote mountains, but they were followed and set upon by Roman soldiers, whose leader read out charges against them and then ordered the beheading of Andrew and any man with him who would not renounce the Christian faith. Since not a single one would, they were all executed, reciting prayers as they died.

At the place where the martyrs died, a spring gushed forth. One hot day, a man who was walking in the area drank from the spring. Though he had only thought of quenching his thirst, he found that a serious illness from which he was suffering was suddenly cured. The spring's curative power soon became known to the locals, and then to others in more distant places. As generations of people came for healing, they were told the story of Andrew and the other martyrs who died there.

The waters of baptism had brought Andrew and his companions into the family of Christ. The waters of the spring offered healing, which also brought people closer to Christ and His Kingdom.

Troparion - Tone 5

You renounced the glory of earthly rank
and inherited the kingdom of heaven;
you adorned your incorruptible crown
as with beautiful stones.
You led an army of martyrs to Christ,
and with the angels in the never-fading light
you found Christ the never-setting sun.
Together with those who suffered with you,
holy general Andrew,
ever pray to Him that He may save our souls.