

Count Others As Better Than Yourselves

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>.



October 28 is the feast day of one of the great saints of the Church in Russia: Dimitri of Rostov. He was born in Kiev in 1651, the son of a regimental lieutenant.

Named Daniel at birth, the young boy showed a gift for languages, and great intellectual ability. He studied hard, and loved to spend time in quiet prayer or talking with others about God. So at the age of 17 he entered a monastery, and as time went on he was asked to preach at various churches and monasteries because of the excellence of his sermons. These were especially important because many less-educated Orthodox were not strong in their faith. Dimitri was able to present Orthodoxy in clear, understandable terms.

The Metropolitan of Kiev decided that a good way to strengthen Orthodox believers in their faith was to provide an inspiring life story of a saint for each day of the year. The saints' lives needed to be collected, assembled in their proper daily order, and put into simple language. For this huge task the Metropolitan chose Dimitri, who was then abbot of the Baturin Monastery in northern Ukraine. Dimitri would work on the Lives of the Saints for the next twenty years.

Some years later, Dimitri was appointed Metropolitan of Siberia by the Emperor Peter. But because his health was delicate, he knew he could not live in Siberia's harsher climate. So he was assigned instead to succeed the aging Metropolitan of Rostov.

Saint Dimitri continued to explain the teachings of the Orthodox Church in writing and in sermons. He used his own money to build a school in Rostov, visited and cared for the sick and needy, and counseled those who sought his guidance.

But he never stopped trying to come closer to God, and he was aware of the effort it takes. In one prayer he wrote: "Open, O doors and bolts of my heart, that Christ the King of Glory may enter!" Saint Dimitri recognized the "doors and bolts" on his heart that we all have. He knew they can keep Christ out if we do not struggle to undo them and let Him in.

During this week (November 1) we read Saint Paul's admonition to the Philippians: "... in humility count others better than yourselves" (2:3). When Saint Dimitri knew he was near death (though others thought him perfectly healthy) he invited a monk who had been helpful to him to sit and talk. The monk was astonished when Dimitri bowed low before him and thanked him for his assistance. He asked Dimitri, "Why do you bow to me, the least of servants?" But Dimitri merely thanked him again with a humble bow.

The next day the saint was found dead, still kneeling in prayer. When the monks went to gather his things, they found only a few simple items of clothing and some books. Saint Dimitri had given away everything else. As always, he had counted others as greater than himself.