

Destroyer of Royalty and Servant of the King

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>.



The Church honors the Holy and Great Martyr Irene on May 5th.

She lived in the fourth century in the city of Magedon, Persia. Her royal parents named her Penelope, and her father Licinius decided to protect her from the evil world. When she was six, he installed her in a small castle with every comfort and a staff of servants. The wise tutor Apellianus instructed her, from behind a curtain. Licinius placed statues of pagan gods as guardians throughout the castle. Here she was to live till her parents betrothed her to a worthy young man.

Penelope begged her father not to shut her away from the sound of bird songs and the sight of the changing light of day. But the king was determined, so she stayed where she was. What Licinius apparently did not know was that the old tutor Apellianus was a Christian, and was instilling the teachings of Jesus Christ in his young daughter.

One day Penelope had a disturbing vision. She saw a window suddenly open in the castle wall. A dove flew in with an olive branch in its beak, and dropped it on a table. Then an eagle swooped in with a wreath of flowers, which it also placed on the table.

Finally a raven flew in carrying a wriggling snake, and dropped it on the table.

Penelope turned to her tutor to explain these things. Apellianus, in awed wonder, told her that they were signs of her becoming perfect in faith and serving God well, but also enduring sufferings sent by Satan. Apellianus said it was clear that she was meant to belong to Jesus Christ. Realizing this was also what she wanted, Penelope was baptized, taking the name Irene.

When Irene refused every suitor her father offered her, he couldn't understand such disobedience in his carefully-raised daughter. And why, he thundered, had she dared to change her name? But when he tried to punish her by having horses trample her, the animals charged him instead and killed him. Irene prayed fervently, and raised her father from the dead. Seeing the miracle, he and his wife, plus many onlookers, became followers of Christ. After that, Irene served the Lord by converting and healing great numbers of people.

But she would also have more encounters with pagan rulers. One of these, the Persian king Sapor, called her a "destroyer of royalty" because she had turned her father from the Persian gods and had defeated or converted other royal pagans, after enduring humiliating tortures.

God revealed to Irene the time when her life was about to end. She found a new tomb and asked followers to close it with a large stone after she had gone inside. When they came again several days later, they found it empty.

On this day we read Acts 10: 21-33, in which the apostle Peter "shakes up" the community by unlawfully meeting with a non-Jew, Cornelius. The great martyr Saint Irene also shook things up and was accused of "destroying royalty." Their "unlawful" actions were for the same reason: they were servants of the King.

Troparion - Tone 4

Your lamb Irene calls out to You, O Jesus, in a loud voice:
"I love You, my Bridegroom, and in seeking You I endure suffering.
In baptism I was crucified so that I might reign in You,
and I died so that I might live with You.
Accept me as a pure sacrifice,
for I have offered myself in love."
Through her prayers save our souls, since You are merciful.