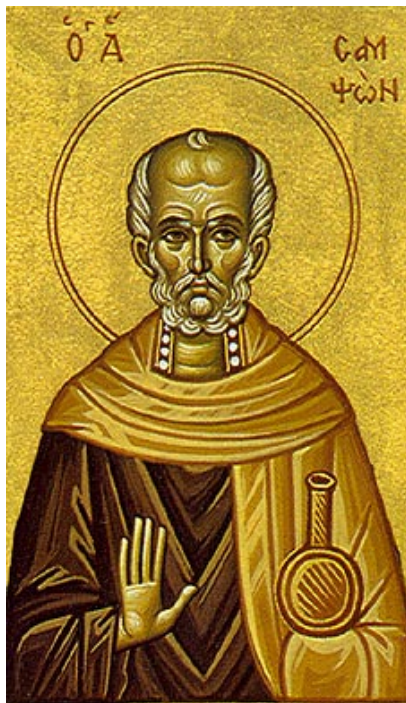


Giving It All Up When You Have It All

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 celebrates the memory of a man who, from birth, truly "had it all." He is Saint Sampson the Hospitable. In some accounts he is also given the title of Physician.

He was born in Rome in the 5th century to a wealthy, prominent family. The study of medicine particularly interested him, and his privileged position enabled him to pursue it fully, while also receiving an excellent and well-rounded education.

Sampson belongs to a group of saints known as "Unmercenaries." These saints cared for those who needed medicine or healing without asking for payment. When Sampson completed his medical studies, he willingly served as a physician to anyone who needed him. Along with medicine and physical care, he gave comfort and spiritual guidance, urging everyone he met to trust and serve Jesus Christ.

His loving care wasn't limited to those who were considered, in the stratified Roman society, to be his equals. When his parents died he freed all the slaves he had inherited as part of a vast fortune. His inherited money went to help the poor, and he made plans to live simply in the wilderness.

But he came to understand that he could serve God better living among people, so he moved to Constantinople. He took a small house and offered its shelter to homeless people, while continuing to serve as a physician and caring friend.

The Patriarch of Constantinople heard about Sampson's work, and called him to priestly ordination. More people got to know who he was after he was ordained, but his quiet ministry of healing didn't change at all.

When Emperor Justinian became gravely ill and his doctors could find no cure, Sampson was sent for. His fervent prayer healed the emperor, who was so relieved and grateful that he wanted to bestow lavish gifts on the man who had cured him.

But Sampson had already had the kinds of things the emperor wanted to give him. He respectfully reminded the monarch of this, and said, "I left those things behind for the sake of Christ, so that I might find heavenly and eternal wealth." Perhaps only a person who has given up great riches is able to understand so well how little they mean in comparison to God's gifts.

Sampson did receive a reward from the emperor. He requested that Justinian build a hospital to serve the people of Constantinople. His request was fulfilled, and the hospital became the largest free clinic in the empire.

One commentator remarked on the uniquely Christian character of the hospital:

"It should be noted that such institutions were unknown to the pagans. They built grandiose edifices, temples to their gods, palaces, theaters, circuses whose ruins amaze us even today by their enormous size. They spent huge amounts on luxury and pleasure, but nowhere do we see that they tried to ease the lot of the sick and the suffering." (From "Selected Lives of Saints", compiled by A.N. Bakhmeteva, Moscow 1872.)

Troparion - Tone 8

Through your patience, your unceasing prayer,
your love for the poor and the help you gave to them,
you became worthy of your reward, O holy Sampson.
Intercede with Christ God that He may save our souls