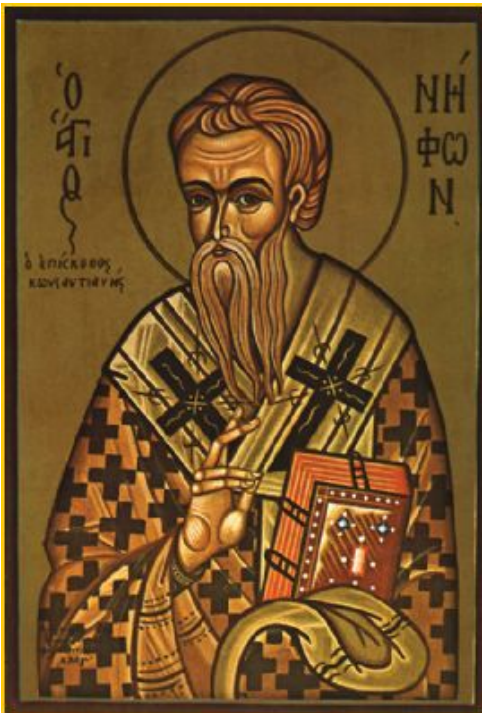


Looking Forward to the Mansion While Living in Tents

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 Saint Niphon, Bishop and Wonderworker.

Born in Paphlagonia, in the Asian part of modern Turkey, he had loving parents who took him to church and oversaw his education in Constantinople. The family was associated with the court of a military commander, so he knew the "proper" life of the court.

But as happens to some who are born with many advantages and little to strive for, Niphon was drawn to a life that was anything but proper. He indulged himself in all kinds of excess and vice. At times, when he remembered his upbringing, the ugliness of his life disgusted him. But the disgust only convinced him that he was a hopelessly lost soul. Feeling unable even to pray, he resigned himself to his vices.

A friend revealed the depth of Niphon's corruption to him in a startling way. He looked into Niphon's face for a long time with an expression of surprise and horror. When Niphon asked why he was staring so intently, the friend said, "Your face is completely changed. I have never seen it look like that before."

Niphon knew it was his sinfulness that gave his face its frightening appearance. Remembering again his early faith, he cried out to the Mother of God for help. He began to pray constantly for her intercession; sometimes he would see her smiling radiantly and other times—when he fell into sin again—he could not see her at all. But after years of struggle and prayer, he felt her guiding him toward monasticism, and was tonsured a monk.

His struggles did not end. He had visions of demons who continuously whispered, "There is no God! Why do you bother to strive so, when there is no God?"

But Niphon did strive, since he now knew he had something to strive for. He worked hard to purify his thoughts and to live in repentance. He was finally granted the ability to overcome the evil spirits that tormented him, and to confront the demons that he could see troubling other people.

Niphon was consecrated Bishop of Constantia, Cyprus when he was quite old, and served for just a short while. A young deacon who would become Saint Athanasius visited him before he died and reported that his face, that same face once distorted by sin, had shone like the sun.

Hebrews 11: 9-10 describes Abraham looking forward to the eternal mansion of God "while living in tents" on this earth. Abraham believed God's promises when it would have been easy to conclude that God Himself had forgotten them and had left His people to wander in this earthly desert forever.

Saint Niphon, too, had to guard his faith when demons told him that no mansion awaits. His struggle and final victory, like Abraham's, remind us that the tents of the desert are not our everlasting home.