

Married Saints

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 May 3, the Church honors a married couple whose names were Timothy and Maura.

They grew up in the same small Egyptian village in the third century. Timothy was the son of a priest and owned many books used in church, as well as his most prized book--a copy of the Scriptures. He also could read, and after a day's work people would gather around him to hear the sacred words. The Bishop of the Thebaid ordained him a reader, and the villagers hoped that one day he would be their priest.

Maura was a pious young woman whose Christian kindness and happy nature made her a favorite in the village, so people were delighted when she and Timothy planned to wed. But they had been married for just twenty days when their joy was threatened by the poison of jealousy.

A group of pagans near the village, already envious of Timothy's ability to read and to gather people around him, worried that with Maura by his side his influence would only increase. They denounced him to the pagan governor Arianus, saying that he and his new wife were drawing the worshippers of the gods away from their faith.

Arianus demanded that Timothy turn over his sacred books, but Timothy refused and said that because the books supported his faith and that of the villagers, "the angels of the Lord guard them and us."

Timothy was tortured so severely that he lost his eyesight, but even then he wouldn't renounce his faith. So Arianus put pressure on Maura, pretending to be concerned for her youth and telling her it was a shame to give up the future years of married happiness she and her husband were sure to have. He urged her to convince Timothy to be sensible and sacrifice to the gods so that they could continue their new life together.

Maura agreed to encourage her husband, but what she encouraged him to do was to stand firm, no matter what was done to him. She finally joined him in martyrdom, and together they are remembered as great champions for the faith.

There are many other married saints whose stories are beautiful and inspiring. The book "Marriage as a Path to Holiness" (St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1994) contains many of these stories, well-told by the authors, Drs. David and Mary Ford. In addition, the book offers commentaries of Saint John Chrysostom and others, and excellent explanations of the marriage service and its meaning. There are copious and helpful notes.

The authors also include important historical information. For example, they tell us that mandatory clerical celibacy came up at the Council of Nicaea. It was Saint Paphnutius of Egypt who defended the Church's practice of married clergy so convincingly that it has never been questioned since in the Eastern Church.

The book acknowledges the importance of monasticism as a way of life that can lead many to the Kingdom, but as its title makes clear, marriage is also a path to holiness.

