

Saint and Patriarch Paul the Confessor

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 remembers a fourth-century Patriarch of Constantinople, Paul the Confessor. He was never to have a peaceful time as Patriarch, having been marked as an enemy by powerful people--those who followed the Arian heresy.

Paul became Patriarch on the advice of his predecessor, Patriarch Alexander. As Alexander lay on his deathbed, the people asked him who they should choose to follow him, and he gave a very revealing response: "Take Macedonius if you wish to have a figurehead as your leader. If you want a shepherd to guide and teach you, and to be a Christian example, choose Paul."

The people did as Alexander hoped they would. Paul became Patriarch, but the Arians managed to have him deposed. He was forced to flee to Rome with the great Saint Athanasius. Once there, Paul and Athanasius were welcomed by Pope Julian and Constans, the Emperor in the West. They appreciated Paul's unwavering dedication to the true faith, and joined him in opposing the influential Arian teaching that Jesus Christ is not the divine and eternal Son of God, but a created being.

Through the influence of the pope and the emperor, Paul was restored to the patriarchal throne. But the Arians would not allow him to stay, and maneuvered to have him exiled to the far reaches of the Empire. And in the year 351, his enemies tracked him down in his place of exile and strangled him as he celebrated the Divine Liturgy. Not content with his death, they also killed two priests who had served with him as secretaries.

Thirty years later, the Emperor Theodosius brought the Patriarch's relics to Constantinople, and then they were taken to Venice. Paul is venerated as one who didn't let enemies of the faith deter him, even though he lived with the knowledge that they wouldn't give up until they had taken his life.

Luke's twelfth chapter seems to have a direct application to the life of this Patriarch and other saints like him. In the first verse Jesus is speaking "when so many thousands of the multitude had gathered together that they trod upon one another." He warns them that all the hidden things, even words "whispered in private rooms", will be revealed in the last days.

But then He reminds them not to be afraid of the things that are not the most important. He says, "I tell you, my friends, do not fear those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do." To get over this fear is a big challenge for most of us, but Paul clearly had mastered the fear, and was living by Jesus' words.

Troparion - Tone 3

For confessing the divine faith,
among her priests the Church has shown you to be another Paul.
Abel cries out to the Lord together with you, as does the righteous blood of Zachariah.
Venerable father, entreat Christ God to grant us His great mercy.

In the next verses, Jesus makes a promise to every person who witnesses to the truth as Patriarch Paul did: "Every one who acknowledges me before men, the Son of man will also acknowledge before the angels of God."