

Saint Raphael, Bishop of Brooklyn

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>.



Founder of 30 parishes; magazine publisher; fluent in Arabic, Russian, Greek and English; spiritual father to Orthodox from New York to California and Mexico to Canada: these are partial descriptions of Saint Raphael.

Born in Syria in 1860, Rafla Hawaweeny had to flee to Lebanon with his family to escape persecution of Christians. His parish priest, like many believers in much earlier centuries, was martyred, a victim of the anti-Christian riots that roared through Damascus the year Rafla was born. Though his family was able to return to Syria, Rafla never forgot that the faith is often under attack and must be defended.

The young boy's education was always geared toward the priesthood. At the age of 17, being an excellent student, he was chosen to attend the School of Theology on the island of Halki in Greece. After graduation he returned to Syria and began visiting parishes with the Patriarch. In 1889 he was sent to Moscow, where he was ordained to the priesthood and then given the rank of archimandrite, with the name Raphael.

In 1895, Archimandrite Raphael came to New York at the invitation of the Syrian Orthodox community there. He served New York faithfully, but felt great concern about other Arab Christians in towns and cities across the country who had no pastors and were often drawn to non-Orthodox

churches that offered worship in English and the chance to be part of a church community. In 1896, he set out across the country to find and minister to these people. He would sometimes walk around visiting families all day Saturday, then take a long journey by train to another town so that he could perform the Sunday Divine Liturgy there. He preached, taught, performed the sacraments, and with loving firmness encouraged everyone to remain strong in their Orthodox faith.

As leader of the Russian Mission to America, the Russian hierarch was acknowledged as the head of the Church in America and of all the ethnic groups within it; no ethnic jurisdictions as yet existed. In 1903, the hierarch was Bishop Tikhon, who was later to be canonized. Needing help with his growing American flock, Bishop Tikhon asked the Holy Synod of Bishops in Russia to name Archimandrite Raphael as Bishop of Brooklyn, which they did. He became the first Orthodox bishop to be consecrated in America.

In the next years he assisted Bishop Tikhon in administering the Diocese, consecrated the grounds for St. Tikhon's Monastery, and began publishing "The Word" (in Arabic "Al-Kalimat") Magazine to reach the far parishes of the Syro-Arab Mission which he still led. He also continued his pastoral visits, urging the use of English where appropriate, until his death in 1915.

Proverbs 6:6 advises us to "go to the ant" and "consider her ways, and be wise." Saint Raphael had the energy and wisdom that the verse praises. But more important, he had the love for people, whatever their ethnicity, that makes a bishop a true father to his flock.

Troparion - Tone 1

Your proclamation has gone forth throughout North America, calling the scattered sheep into the unity of the church. hearing your voice, they responded to your teaching, and through your writings you instructed them in piety. now guided by your example, O Father Raphael, we sing hymns of praise unto Christ our God.
Glory to Him Who gave you strength!
Glory to Him Who granted you a crown!
Glory to Him Who, through you, grants healing to all!