

The Enemy Still Works Against Us

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>.



October 29 is the feast day of the Venerable Abramius, Recluse of Mesopotamia. He lived in the fourth century.

Abramius left his parental home while still fairly young, and went to the desert to live in prayerful seclusion. But he never ignored the needs of others, and over the years he offered spiritual counsel and healing to many people who sought him out. He lovingly guided his orphaned niece Maria in the ascetical life. His contemporary Saint Ephrem the Syrian so admired the lives of both Abramius and Maria that he wrote about them.

After some years in the desert, Abramius was appointed to be priest of a pagan village. The villagers, worshippers of earth-centered gods, strongly resisted teaching about a heavenly Kingdom and subjected Abramius to great abuse. But he continued to pray for the well-being and enlightenment of his flock, working patiently with them. By the end of three years most of the villagers had been baptized.

Abramius returned to the desert and resumed his secluded life. His spiritual efforts strengthened him, and as they did he became a special target of the devil. Once in his cell, at midnight, he saw a shimmering light and heard a beautiful voice say, "You are truly blessed, Abramius, for nobody else has done my will as you have."

His holy life had enabled Abramius to recognize the deadly flattery of a demon posing as an angel. He ordered the demon out: "I don't fear you and your illusions; I trust in the help and grace of my God."

The devil appeared in other tempting guises, but Saint Abramius was able to withstand them. When his beloved niece Maria strayed from her godly life, he helped her regain her spiritual balance. The two died within a few years of each other, both trusting in God's love and forgiveness.

Reading about the deceptive visions that came to early saints, we may think that such things no longer happen, at least not to "ordinary" people. But in the book "Everyday Saints" (Pokrov Publications, 2012) Father Tikhon of the Pskov Caves Monastery in northwestern Russia writes about the experiences of some university students in the 1980's. Out of curiosity, they arranged nocturnal séances, after a professor described the mystical experiments of certain well-known Russian scientists.

At first the students were fascinated by the answers they received about future events, especially from the "spirit" of Nikolai Gogol, a famous nineteenth-century writer they all admired. But one night this spirit began groaning in agony and begging for their help.

Naively flattered, they readily offered it. They were stunned when the spirit said, "If you really are ready to help...then I'd give you some poison."

The students were firmly convinced that the spirit was urging them to suicide, and that if they remained in its presence they would succumb. They were equally convinced that only God the Savior could deliver them.

The Church's stern warning against "mystical experiments" isn't based on outdated superstition. In the 21st century, as in the 4th and the 20th, our enemy is still at work.

