Three Brave Women

Department of CHRISTIAN EDUCATION ORTHODOX CHURCH in AMERICA

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On August 3rd the Church honors three women saints. The first was a contemporary of Jesus Christ, and the other two lived much later.

The first of these women saints is Salome, not the girl who danced for Herod, but one of the myrrhbearing women who went to the tomb of Christ on the morning of the Resurrection. The second is the unnamed sister of nine Georgian brothers, who lived in the seventeenth century. The third is her mother, also unnamed.

Mark 16: 1 tells us that Salome was one of three women who took spices and oils to Jesus' tomb, planning to anoint His body in the customary Jewish way. She is traditionally identified as the mother of the disciples James and John, whose father was Zebedee. In Matthew 25: 56 we read that "the mother of Zebedee's sons" was looking on from afar, with two other women, as Jesus hung on the cross.

Showing dedication to Christ publicly by going to His tomb was a brave act. That's clear from the fact that the male disciples were afraid to do the same thing, and hid away instead.

The myrrhbearing women themselves weren't free of fear. They knew of public scorn for Jesus, who had died so ignominiously after promising so much. They were well aware that hostile, armed soldiers were guarding His tomb. But they were determined, and had a depth of love for Christ that soldiers could not threaten.

The two Georgian women, mother and daughter, also faced soldiers, but in more immediate and dangerous circumstances. The full name of the group of saints to which they belong is "9000 Martyrs of Merabda with the Nine Kherkheulidze Brothers with their Mother and Sister." The nine brothers belonged to the Georgian army.

The Georgians had managed to defeat the Persian troops of Shah Abbas in the spring of 1625. Their victory had not only done much to unite the country of Georgia, but had encouraged other peoples ruled and oppressed by the Persians; resistance began to spring up in various places.

An infuriated Shah Abbas sent 50,000 of his toughest troops to engage the 20,000 Georgian fighters camped at Merabda. Before the battle, the Georgians received Holy Communion, and the bishops who administered it joined them in the field to fight.

The day-long encounter, in sweltering heat, overwhelmed the Georgians. When the last of the Kherkheulidze brothers, who were banner carriers, was killed, their sister ran out to raise the banner herself. When she also fell, her mother picked up and waved the banner till she too was killed. They all died for the faith and for their motherland.

On this day we read I Corinthians 1: 18: "For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." Whether facing scorn and hostility like Salome, or actual death in battle like the Georgians, three brave women show us the strength that faith in God's power can have.