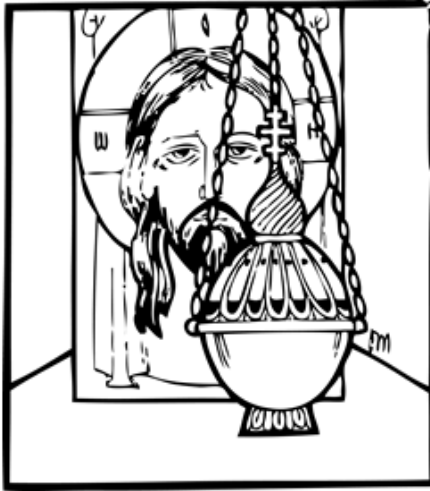


Turning Weeping into Joy

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 September 27 a "new martyr" is remembered by the Church. Her name is Aquilina.

The term "new martyr" refers to those who witnessed to their faith in recent centuries. Aquilina lived in the 1700's, and was born in a small village in Thessalonica. Her family, like many in that time and place, managed to live peacefully enough among Turkish Muslim neighbors.

But one day Aquilina's father unwisely lost his temper during an argument with a Muslim man who lived nearby. His rage was so intense that he struck the man with all his force. When he was arrested and brought before the ruling Pasha, he realized with terror that as a Christian he faced execution for having killed a Muslim.

To save his life, he agreed to convert to Islam. This broke the heart of Aquilina's mother, a staunch Christian. She urged her daughter to be the same, and never deny the true God.

When Aquilina reached the age of eighteen, her father said to her, "The other Muslims are saying that one day you will have to become a Muslim anyway. So why not do it now so that I can live in peace? Let me be free of their questions and disapproving looks."

Aquilina didn't hesitate for a moment to tell him that she would not, could not, turn away from Christ. Knowing the precarious situation in which she and other Christians were living, she added that she wasn't afraid to face suffering for her faith.

Her father's desire to preserve his own life again determined his actions. He told the Muslim authorities, "I can't do anything with this stubborn girl. Treat her any way you wish to."

Aquilina was soon taken away for questioning. In answer to her mother's urgent plea that she stay strong in the faith, she said, "I intend to, with God's help. Pray for me."

But the mother's faith was to be sorely tested when Aquilina was brought home after being severely tortured. Horrified at the ugly wounds on her daughter's body, she dressed the hurt places as best she could and asked, "What have you done, my dear child?" Though she had hoped Aquilina would be strong, the price of a daughter's broken body was a high one.

Barely able to speak, Aquilina managed to answer, "I have kept the faith, as we agreed." With that, she gave her soul to God.

As Aquilina's body was carried to her tomb, her mother and the Christians accompanying it smelled a wonderful fragrance, and saw light shining on the grave. Her mother's sorrow was lightened, too, knowing that her daughter was with the One she had never denied.

One verse we read on this day is Luke 6: 21b. Jesus says, "Blessed are you that weep now, for you shall laugh." He was acknowledging that this world's life can cause us to weep, as it did Aquilina's mother. But He wanted her, and us, to remember that the world to come is full of joy.