

LITURGY OF THE KINGLY HIGH PRIEST

The Divine Liturgy of St. Basil the Great lies at the very heart of the spiritual life of the Byzantine Christian. It prepares him for the greatest feasts of the Church year. The searing strains of this eucharist prayer usher in the vigils of Christmas and Theophany as well as sanctifying Holy Thursday and Great Saturday. In addition, it is the Liturgy that nourishes the faithful during the Lenten struggle on the Sundays of the Great Fast. No wonder, then that this cherished rite is served on the heavenly birthday of its author, January 1. A happy coincidence has it occur on the feast of the Circumcision. The day on which the kingly High Priest shed His first drops of blood to redeem His people also sees the commemoration of the high priest Basil, whose name means king and whose words to this day accompany the hallowing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ.

St. Basil has many claims to honor. He was born into a remarkable family. His father, also named Basil, was a bishop. After the elder Basil's death, his mother Emilia joined his sister Macrina in the desert to lead a monastic life. His younger brother Gregory did not enter the monastery but rather chose marriage as a path of salvation. He became bishop of Nyssa. All are revered as saints.

St. Basil is one of the greatest of the Greek Fathers of the Church – being ranked with Sts. John Chrysostom and Gregory the Theologian. He was a prolific author and is especially remembered for his peerless treatise *On the Holy Spirit*. Few have influenced religious life as much as he by his *Rule for Monks*. In addition, he was an exemplary bish-

op of one of the major sees of the Christian East, Ceasarea in Cappadocia.

St. Basil enjoys high esteem even among children, for his name figures in so many Greek Christmas carols. On January 1st a great treat called the *vasilopita* (St. Basil's cake) is blessed and served up at a party. A coin has been blended into the batter.

Whoever gets the piece with the coin will have an especially blessed new year and will be responsible for throwing the next year's *vasilopita* party. A cynic once suggested that many coins have been swallowed so as to avoid the New Year's party. We can rest assured that the Great Cappadocian's memory suffers no tarnish on this account!

If you ask the average Byzantine Catholic or Orthodox layperson why he honors St. Basil so greatly, he will without hesitation tell you it is because of the sublime liturgy that bears his name and which, in all probability, at least in its central prayer (the anaphora) is the work of his hands.

This solemn doxology includes a long series of petitions begging the All-Mighty to "remember" the needs of all the faithful. As you read the excerpts from this masterpiece of exalted prayer you will learn why Byzantium sings of its Great St. Basil:

"You became for the Church a solid foundation, and for all mankind strengthened by your teaching, you became a harbor of refuge, O Venerable Basil who reveal heaven's mysteries!"

PRAYER OF INTERCESSION FROM THE LITURGY OF ST. BASIL

Be mindful, O Lord, of Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church, which extends from end to end of the universe; give peace to her whom You have redeemed with the precious Blood of Your Christ; preserve also this holy church until the end of the world.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who offered You these holy gifts, and of those through whom and for whom they offered.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who bring offerings to Your holy churches and of our benefactors, and of those who remember the poor; reward them with Your rich and heavenly favors; in place of their earthly, temporal and perishable gifts, grant them Your heavenly ones, eternal and incorruptible.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who are living in deserts, on mountains, in the dens and caves of the earth.

Be mindful, O Lord, of those who are living in virginity and who, with reverence and according to asceticism, pursue an honorable way of life.

Be mindful, O Lord, of our civil authorities; give them profound and enduring peace; speak into their hearts good things for Your Church and for all Your people; that in their tranquility, we may lead a calm and quiet life, in all piety and integrity.

Be mindful, O Lord, of every principality and authority, and of our brethren in the government and the armed forces; preserve

the good in Your goodness; make the bad be good according to Your kindness.

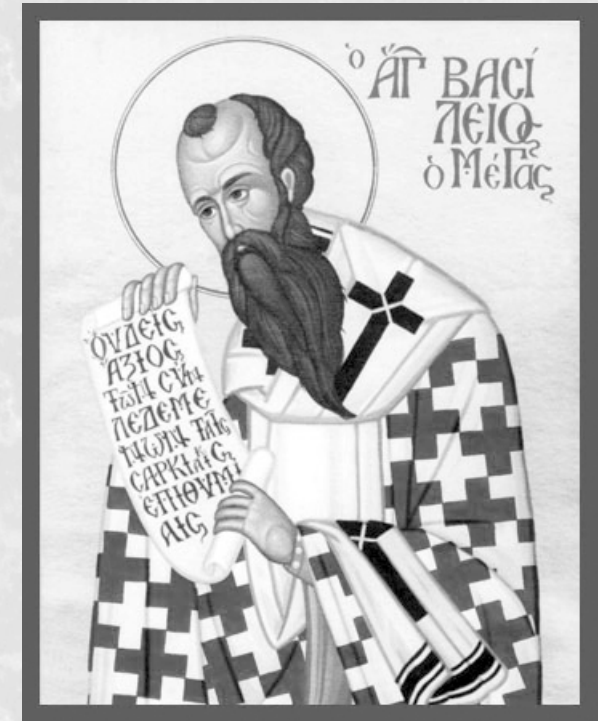
Be mindful, O Lord, of the people standing round and of those who are absent for honorable reasons, and have mercy on them and us according to the great extent of Your mercy. Fill their storehouses with every good thing; preserve their marriages in peace and harmony; foster the children, guide the young, support the aged, encourage the fainthearted, reunite the separated, lead back those who have strayed and join them to Your holy, catholic and apostolic Church; free those who are troubled with unclean spirits; sail with those upon the sea, journey with the travellers, defend the widows, protect the orphans, free those in captivity, heal the sick and be mindful, O Lord, of all those who are in tribunals, mines, exile and bitter servitude, as well as those in any affliction, necessity or distress.

And be mindful, O Lord, our God, of all who beseech Your great tenderness of heart, and of those who love us and of those who hate us, and of those who have asked us, though unworthy, to pray for them.

Be mindful of all Your people, and upon all of them pour out Your rich mercy, granting to all the petitions that are for their salvation. Of those whom we have not remembered through ignorance or forgetfulness or multitude of names, also be mindful, O God, who know the name and age of all – who know each one even from his mother's womb.

For You, O Lord, are a help to helpless, hope to the hopeless, a savior to those tossed about in the tempest, a harbor for the sailor, a physician for the sick; be all things to all men – You know each one and his request, each house and its need. Deliver, O Lord, this city and every city and country from famine, plague, earthquake, flood, fire, sword, the attacks of foreign peoples and from civil wars.

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