

St. Barbaros the Myrrh-Gusher and Wonderworker*

Commemorated on 23 June



THE FATHERLY arms of our Lord are always open to the return of every prodigal human soul that in its deception goes off to “a far country,” so as to satisfy its unquenchable desire for salvation. The outstretched palms of our Lord on the Cross hold all of humanity within them, just as they held the repentant thief, who was the first to dwell in Paradise.

This miracle is a recurrent one in history. Great sinners have become great Saints and left us a perpetual example of repentance, return, and hope for all of us.

One such astonishing model of repentance is that of St. Barbaros, who, from being a fearsome corsair and pirate, reached such an extraordinary height of sanctity that he proved to be a Wonderworker and Myrrh-gusher after his death.

His life in brief is as follows, in accordance with the most reliable account: the narration by the Byzantine savant, Constantine of Acropolis, Grand Logothete in the thirteenth century.

The Saint lived in the ninth century during the reign of King Michael the Stutterer (820-829). He came from among the heathen of the Barbary Coast of North Africa and was a member of a fearsome band of pirates which ravaged the coastlines of Palestine, Sicily, and Crete, the Aegean islands, and Epiros.

At one point, having passed through the Ambracian Gulf, the pirates set ashore in the land of Acarnania in a spirit of destruction. The Acarnanian people engaged in battle at Dragamesti (present day Karaïskaki, Astakos), and, fighting heroically, checked their incursions and defeated them. Barbaros was the only one among them who survived, and he hid himself in a vineyard.

Thereafter, he gave himself over to brigandage and murder, becoming the terror of the Xeromeros region.

Once, he went to plunder a Chapel dedicated to St. George on Mt. Nysa, near Tryphos, in an area with springs. Divine Liturgy, however, was being celebrated at the time, and he found himself before a marvelous sight. God opened the eyes of his wretched—yet, it seems, well-disposed—soul, and he saw the serving Priest, surrounded by light, being supported in the air by Holy Angels! He saw the Divine Infant being sacrificed, being partaken of, and ascending whole and in ineffable glory into the Heavens!

Barbaros was astounded and fell at the feet of the pious Priest, Father John of Nikopolis, who received him, like a good shepherd, comforted him, catechized him, Baptized him, and became his spiritual Father and guide. By the Saint's own request, he was given the name "Barbaros" (barbarian) to remind him of his former behavior and way of life.

The Saint's repentance was so profound that he was tonsured a Monk and remained there, in the place of his spiritual rebirth, living like the Venerable Forerunner in the desert. He even wore chains strapped around himself, to wear out his flesh and bring it into subjection.

By the cultivation of humility and self-reproach, as well as by putting into practice all of the holy virtues, the Saint unwittingly became known to the inhabitants of the surrounding regions, who hastened with fervor to be blessed by the strange holy ascetic, this former pirate and robber-chieftain.

Certain hunters from Nikopolis, while passing through the area of Tryphos where the springs were, saw the Saint in the twilight and took him for game. Thus, they shot their arrows at him. But horror soon overcame them when they realized their fatal mistake!

The Saint, as he lay dying, gathered up his strength and called out: "Drink, O Barbaros, of the cup which you offered to others!" And he gave thanks to God, Who had led him out of the darkness of deception and led him to the light of the Truth by means of his spiritual Father and benefactor, the Priest John. Thus, in prayer and thanksgiving, his soul passed into eternity.

St. Barbaros was buried in the place of his asceticism. God immediately glorified him in return with signs and miracles and also by the flow of myrrh from his grave!

Many centuries later, in 1571, an officer from Venice named Sklavounos, who was taking part at that time in the naval battle of Navpaktos, fell seriously ill and saw the Saint in a dream, telling him to go to his grave to be healed. Indeed, as soon as the officer venerated the tomb, he was miraculously healed and took the holy Relics of the Saint with him as he departed.

While traveling to Venice, he set ashore at the village of Potamos in Kerkyra. There, the Saint healed a paralytic, and for this reason a Church dedicated to him was erected, in which he is honored to this day. There is also a Church dedicated to the Saint, in addition to one at the site of his asceticism, in a village in Levkada.

It is surmised that his wonderworking Relics, which ended up in Italy, are preserved to this day in a village in Northern Italy which bears the Saint's name: San Barbaro!

May they one day be discovered and brought back to the place of his sanctification, for the blessing and comfort of the Faithful.

Through the holy intercessions of St. Barbaros, O Christ our God, have mercy on us and save us! □