



■ On the occasion of the commemoration of his repose (May 14, 1474)

Saint Isidor of Rostov the Fool-for-Christ *

THE BLESSED Isidor (Tverdislov) lived in the middle of the fifteenth century. Though Slavic by birth, he lived in Brandenburg, one of the most ancient cities of Prussia. During those years, the Slavs of this region were fiercely persecuted by the Germans, who were trying to convert the entire population to Papism.

When he reached adolescence and perceived the insolvency of the Roman Catholic Faith, Isidor sought to move to an Orthodox Christian land.

Belonging to the wealthy merchant class, he willingly forswore his wealth, his parents, and his inheritance, and for Christ's sake began to roam from place to place with his staff.

We do not know exactly when Isidor converted to Orthodoxy, nor when he arrived in Russia, but he ultimately settled in Rostov, north of Moscow.

He found a marshy area within the city and chose a site slightly above the water level. There, he built a small hut with bulrush. This hut afforded no protection from the heat or the cold, since it was not covered by anything; it only concealed his great asceticism from





the eyes of the world.

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THE SAINT spent his time in the customary manner of fools-for-Christ's sake. At night, he prayed unceasingly, allowing himself only a brief sleep. His days were spent in the city streets or marketplaces with voluntary acts of foolish-

ness. Occasionally, he would rest his weary body on a pile of waste or manure.

He instructed and taught those who desired spiritual guidance, condemned immorality, and led many souls to the path of salvation. At night, he would pray for all of those who had caused him offense and for those whom he saw wallowing in sin.

“Oh, Isidor!” he often said to himself, and cried out: “You must pass through many sorrows to enter the Kingdom of Heaven.”

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THE SAINT'S love for the Lord was great, wherefore the Lord loved him and granted him the gift of working miracles and of prophecy.

• “On one occasion,” his biographer relates, “a Rostov merchant was with his comrades at sea during a terrible storm. The ship, probably having struck a reef, suddenly stopped and began to be broken up by the waves. The strong force of the sea threatened to destroy it.

“In their despair, all of those on board began to prepare for death. Then, in the midst of their misfortune, imitating the case of the Prophet Jonah, the voyagers decided to cast lots, supposing that the ship had stopped on account of a crime committed by one of the passengers. The lot fell on the Rostov merchant, who was also the owner of the ship. The crowd then threw the merchant into the sea

together with a plank.

“Cast by the wrath of his companions into the raging sea, the hapless merchant began to surrender himself to death. Suddenly, the Blessed Isidor appeared before him, walking on the sea as if on dry land. The Saint took the merchant by the hand and asked him, ‘Do you know who I am?’ The unfortunate man, barely breathing, said: ‘Servant of God, Isidor, help me....’

“The Blessed Isidor pulled the merchant onto the piece of wood and, as if propelled by an unseen hand, the plank began to follow the ship that had already departed. When it came alongside the ship, the merchant suddenly found himself on the deck. When the other voyagers saw him in their midst, they were struck with terror and glorified the merciful God, because they understood that a miracle had taken place. The merchant kept silent, because the Saint had strictly forbidden him to tell exactly what had happened.

“When he returned to Rostov, the merchant would make a prostration to the Saint whenever he saw him from a distance; and the latter, passing nearby him, would remind him of his prohibition. Thus, the merchant would always say that God had saved him by an intervention of His Grace.”

- In another instance, two close friends of noble birth, Savva and Simeon, were comrades-in-arms in the battle with Vasili Shemyaka. A third comrade, Prince Simeon, had been wounded and was now bed-ridden. The two friends decided to visit him.

There, at his bedside, they met the relatives of the wounded soldier, including the family of his brother, Prince Vasili. Vasili’s daughter, Daria, was a very beautiful maiden with whom Savva fell in love. They eventually became engaged and, soon after, celebrated a wedding of unusual grandeur. On the day of the wedding feast, which took place at Simeon’s home, Saint Isidor suddenly entered at the house. The servants tried to drive him away, but he evaded them and noisily entered the feast hall. In his hands he held a cap woven of grass and wild flowers. Reaching the groom, he placed the cap on his head, saying: “Here! A Bishop’s cap for you!”

The mysterious gift and the strange words of the Saint confused Savva and his guests, but Saint Isidor quickly disappeared from the

hall and was heard with the children on the streets.

The gift and prophetic words of the blessed Fool were not in vain, and were eventually understood later. Daria became pregnant, and while returning to Rostov, gave birth to a son. The birth was exceedingly difficult and brought about the mother's death. The loss of his beloved wife so shook Savva that he left the world and became a monk at the Monastery of St. Therapont. At his tonsure, he was given the name Iosaph and later was Consecrated Bishop of Rostov (1481-1489).

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IN GENERAL, the Saint rarely entered people's houses, and when he did so, he was usually unceremoniously thrown out.

One such occasion, which took place shortly before his death, was as follows:

Prince Vladimir of Rostov once invited the local Archbishop Vassian to bless his family. That day, after the Liturgy, Saint Isidor hastened to the Prince's house before the others. He entered and asked a servant for a drink, as if wishing to quench his thirst. In reality, however, the Saint did not want to drink, but rather he desired that the blessing of the Lord come upon the family of the pious prince, as the Lord said: "Whoever gives a cup of cold water in My Name will not lose his reward."

The servant not only refused the Saint a drink, but even drove him away. The blessed Fool forgave him and left the house without a protest. But it was God's good pleasure to glorify His Saint and strengthen the faith of the pious prince.

When the Archbishop arrived and those present had sat down at dinner, the time came to serve the wine, but the servants found all of the vessels empty. They anxiously went to inform the prince.

The latter was astonished and hurried to investigate what had happened. He asked his major-domo who had come during the day, and learned that Saint Isidor had visited the house before the meal, asking for a cup of water, but that the servants had driven him away without giving it to him. The prince understood that the miracle was a punishment for the rejection of a beggar by an unmerciful servant.



He immediately sent his servants to the Saint to beg him to return to his house. Saint Isidor, however, was nowhere to be found. The dinner was approaching its end and still there was no wine. The Prince looked about, confused and sorrowful.

Then, Isidor suddenly entered, holding a prosphora in his hand. He came up to the Archbishop and gave him the prosphora, saying that he had just received it from the Metropolitan in the Church of St. Sofia in Kiev.

In the meantime, the major-domo found the vessels full of wine. He informed the prince, and all of those present were amazed and glorified God, Who had worked such miracles through His hidden Saint.

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THE BLESSED Isidor reposed on May 14, 1474.

He did not leave his hut at all during the last days of his earthly life, instead praying with tears until the hour of his righteous repose.

At the moment of his repose, an unusual fragrance spread throughout the entire city. Everyone marveled and began to seek its source. They soon discovered that the closer they approached the blessed Fool's hut, the stronger the fragrance became. Someone ventured to look inside and saw the Saint lying on the ground, face upwards and his hands crossed upon his chest. He announced the death of the man of God to everyone. They buried the Saint in his hut, in the exact spot where he had reposed.

The merchant that had been saved from the sea was at the burial. Finally freed from his bond of silence, he began with sobs to relate to everyone the details of his miraculous rescue.

With the blessing of the Bishop, those who loved and revered Saint Isidor built a wooden chapel near his grave, in honor of the Ascension of the Lord, because the Saint had reposed on the eve of the Feast.

In 1566, by order of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, the wooden chapel was

replaced by a stone Church. A Priest tried to open the Saint's tomb, but an invisible power pushed him back. A silver shrine was placed on the grave in 1815, from whence flowed a steady stream of miracles by the Saint.

The celebration of the commemoration of the Saint by the Faithful began on the very day of his repose. Thirteen years later, his name officially appeared on the Russian Church Calendar.



* Sources:

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