

SYNAXARIA OF THE TRIODION

by Nikephoros Kallistos Xanthopoulos

SAINT LAZARUS SATURDAY

On this day, the Saturday before Palm Sunday, we celebrate the Raising of Lazarus, the holy and righteous friend of Christ, who lay for four days in the tomb.

Verses

Thou lamentest, O Jesus: this belongeth to Thy mortal nature.
Thou givest life to Thy friend: this is wrought by Thy Divine might.

Synaxarion

Lazarus was a Hebrew by birth and a Pharisee by profession, and, as has been ascertained, was a son of Simon the Pharisee, from the village of Bethany. When our Lord Jesus Christ was sojourning in the land for the salvation of our race, Simon was united to Him in friendship. Since Christ was constantly conversing with Simon, in view of the latter's professed belief in the resurrection of the dead, and frequently visited his house, Lazarus became His close friend, and not only Lazarus himself, but also his two sisters, Martha and Mary. Now that the saving Passion was drawing near, it was necessary to provide a more precise assurance of the Mystery of the Resurrection. While Jesus was staying beyond Jordan, having previously raised the daughter of Jairus and the son of the widow from the dead, His friend Lazarus reposed, overcome by a serious illness. Jesus, therefore, though absent, said to His Disciples, "Lazarus sleepeth," and again, after a short time, "Lazarus is dead." Leaving the region around Jordan, He went to Bethany, having been summoned by the sisters of the deceased man (Bethany is about fifteen *stadia* from Jerusalem). He was met by the sisters of Lazarus, who said: "Lord, if Thou hadst been here, our brother would not have died; but even now, if it be Thy will, Thou shalt raise him up; for Thou canst do so." Jesus asked the crowd: "Where have ye laid him?" At once, they all led Him to the tomb. When the stone had been removed, Martha said: "Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days." Then Jesus prayed, and, shedding tears for the one who lay there, cried with a loud voice: "Lazarus, come forth." The dead man immediately came forth, and after being unbound, left for home. This wondrous miracle aroused the people of the Hebrews, who raged against Christ, to envy. Jesus departed once

more. The High Priests plotted to kill Lazarus, because many who saw him joined with Christ. But Lazarus, on learning what they had in mind, fled to the island of Cyprus, and sojourning there, was later made Bishop of the city of Kition by the Apostles. Having lived a good and God-pleasing life for thirty years after he was revived, he reposed again. He is buried in that place, where he has wrought many miracles.

It is said that after he was brought back to life he ate nothing without first sweetening it, and that the All-Pure Mother of God made his *Omophorion* with her own hands and presented him with it. On the basis of a Divine vision, the most wise Emperor Leo transferred this precious and holy Relic from Cyprus and deposited it reverently and at great expense in the Church dedicated to St. Lazarus which he had built in Constantinople; it lies on the right as you enter the Church by the front walls of the holy Altar. This precious Relic of his remains there to this day, giving off an ineffable fragrance.

Our Holy and God-bearing Fathers, or rather, the Holy Apostles, decreed that the Raising of Lazarus be celebrated on this day, after the forty-day Fast, and they decreed that the Holy Passion of our Lord Jesus Christ be celebrated after this, because they ascertained that this miracle was the beginning and cause of the fury of the Jews against Christ, and this is why they assigned this place to such a preternatural wonder. Only St. John the Evangelist wrote about this event, since the other Evangelists passed over it—perhaps because Lazarus was still alive and visible. It is said that this is the reason why St. John wrote the rest of his Gospel, and also because the other Evangelists said nothing about the unoriginate Nativity of Christ; for this is what men were being asked to believe, that Christ was the Son of God and God, that He arose, and that there would be a resurrection of the dead. The latter is more credible on account of the Raising of Lazarus. Lazarus said nothing about the realm of Hades, either because he was not permitted to see things there perfectly or because, having seen them, he was commanded to keep silent about them. It is on this basis that every recently deceased person is called “Lazarus” and his burial shroud is called a *lazáro-ma*, the word perhaps hinting that we should bring to mind the first Lazarus; for if the latter was raised by the word of Christ and came to life again, so the former, although he has died, will rise again at the last trumpet and live eternally.

By the intercessions of Thy friend Lazarus, O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.

