



The Life Of St. Sava (retold for children)

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Once upon a time, in the twelfth century after Christ, at the Serbian court in Ras, a son was born to the Serbian Grand Duke Stefan Nemanja and his wife Ana, to whom his parents gave the name Rastko at his baptism. His elderly parents already had two sons - Vukan and Stefan, but they desired to have still another child. They prayed to God for a long time, constantly kneeling in prayer, so that God would fulfill their desire. And truly, God, knowing their life and effort, to constantly live according to His law, answered their prayer.

The child was extraordinary. His big, blue eyes and his slender physique as well as the clarity of the mind charmed everyone. Rastko played with other children and grew up in the court of his parents. They played just like the other children at that time. They played various games. They made bows and arrows, a wooden sword; they liked to play war games. Their childhood passed with the constant care of their parents. Rastko tried from his earliest days not to anger his parents, and because of this they loved him without measure. Rastko and his brothers received presents from their parents on big holidays, such as Mother's Day, Father's Day, Christmas and Easter. Rastko nonetheless tried to give back to them by his love and goodness.

Rastko grew up reading his father's book. He delighted in listening to his teachers and reading history, heroic poems and stories, but most of all he liked reading the history of Christianity and the lives of the holy men of God. Rastko also stood in prayer every day before the icon and vigil lamp that continuously burned in the "Great Room". When Rastko had grown into a young man, his father, Stefan Nemanja, intended to prepare him for the duties of state that awaited him in the future. So Rastko was given the region called Zahumlye, today's Herzegovina, to administer. Rastko, with the Serbian Nobleman, occasionally went out to rule that region. They often went hunting. At that time hunting was a favorite amusement.

The young Prince Rastko also went hunting, and just like his friends participated in the festivities, but never overdid anything. He never even laughed loudly, but because of this there was always a gently smile on his face. One day, when Rastko was 17 years old, his parents called him into the court in Ras to tell him some very important news. The news could not, however, in any way make him happy. Arriving from Herzegovina to Ras, Rastko found the house full of people. The nobility, couriers and all of the royal relatives had gathered to tell the young prince the good news. That

news was Rastko's marriage. Rastko was very sad. How could he disappoint his parents for the first time in his life? How could he tell them his heart thirsts for something else? How could he tell them? How? How could he tell them he loves something else? How could he tell them he loves spiritual life more than anything else? How could he explain to them that he loves the humble monastic life more than the royal crown and purple? A great sorrow and pain took hold of his soul.

In those days when Rastko arrived from Herzegovina with his accompaniment to Ras, at the court of his father there were also some monks from the Holy Mount, Athos. They had come to ask alms for their monastery. They had no idea that their arrival would be so important and significant for the entire history of the Serbian of the Serbian people. Rastko spent a lot of time talking with them.

He asked them about everything. What kind of life is the monastic life, what does the Holy Mount look like, what should a monk be like? And at the end, the desire of his heart began to be realized. He revealed to them his desire to go with them and then everything became different. The monks became very afraid. If their flight were unsuccessful, the punishment and revenge of the young prince's father would be severe! Anxiety and fear overcame them all. Only Rastko had resolutely decided to carry out his intention.

He asked his parents for a blessing to go hunting with his accompaniment. This request was a great relief for them. They had immediately noticed upon his arrival at the court that the news he had been called for had not had any joyous reaction from him. His daily association with the Athonites was a sign for his parents - they had known earlier that he loved the monastic life more than state power. And so they saw him off with joy. But his going hunting was not entertainment, rather flight. Rastko had made a plan with the monks as to how to flee.

The accompaniment went out of the city. Rastko separated himself from them. And while the hunting party was enjoying itself and, being tired, Rastko was already far away with the three monks riding their fast and strong horses. Great panic and fear took hold of the hunting party. When they informed Rastko's parents that he was lost, Nemanja afraid and sad, ordered a search party to be formed. The search party was strong. The best and most capable soldiers with their leaders went in pursuit.

Rastko had a difficult and dangerous road to travel to the Holy Mountain. There was no time to rest; they had to arrive before the search party. What if the search party caught them? They would all be lost! Would there ever be a chance like this one? Fortunately, after only a few days and nights of the difficult road through the mountains and rocky terrain of the Bulgarian and Greek lands, the Holy Mountain was already in sight.

-Look, oh, Prince, that peak is called Athos, which is the summit of the Holy Mountain!

-Most-good Father, the Giver of all good things, bless my eyes that see this. Fr. Nikanor, I thank God and you on this day. This is the day that the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it. The prophetically words are fulfilled in my soul, there is no greater joy than this, father.

-Let's go, oh, Prince! We have several more hours to go to the Russian Monastery of Panteleimon.

-I cannot get enough of this beauty.

-Oh, what a most beautiful place. Behold, father, it's as if heaven is opened.

-The blessing of the Mother of God is there; the grace of God is in great abundance there, Prince. There, men feel as if they are in paradise. You shall see, dear Price, but let us go, let us go, the search party is surely behind us. Your father will figure out where you went. Only God can help us now!

The day was drawing to a close; the athonite monks had already begun their evening services. Panteleimon was in sight. It's high walls seemed divine. The great fatigue and rush were not important. Joy overcame everything.

-How great is the joy of my heart, dear father! The sorrow and pain of my parents will cease when

once they understand and feel warmth and joy for this place. I will comfort my parents with prayer, and with love for the monastic life I will reimburse them for the separation from me. My parents will understand all of this. How wonderful and slim are these Cyprus trees, oh, how divine and huge these olive trees, as if the groves from my Serbia had come with us along these paths since we have come to the Holy Mountain.

-A little more remains, dear Prince! When this magnificent sun which now, in the cool of the day, red as the purple on your shoulder, sets behind the sea, we shall, with God's help, arrive. Oh, what great joy you will bring, dear Prince, to our monks, when they look upon you! But everyone will be afraid when they learn that you are a fugitive and that you come against your parents will. But I believe that God will help us, dear brother.

The small column of refugees was already before the monastery. The monastery gate was already closed. The monk Nikanor opened the monastery doors and a beautiful sight was opened before Rastko. The monastery church with the surrounding buildings and towers gave a majestic impression. There was no end to their joy when they understood who had come to be their guest. A prince from the nearby land had come to them. Oh, God, how wonderful that is! His purple cloak with gold plated claps and most beautiful princely clothing seemed like a fairy tale to those clothed in black.

No one even imagined that the royal purple would be exchanged for the black cassock that very evening. The young prince was no ordinary passer-by or visitor. The evening service was not yet finished, but the sound of horse's hooves could already be heard behind the monastery walls. The furious soldiers with their leader, learning that Rastko was in the monastery, with great shouts and threats demanded to see him immediately. Understanding that they would do the monks harm, Rastko appeared before the soldiers, asking them to calm down and not to worry.

-Your parents sent us to take you home alive and well! Why did you do this to your old parents? We must return with you immediately. Your parents are impatiently waiting our return.

-I ask you, tell my parents the desire of my heart.

-We'll tie you up! We must fulfill the command of our master! You will come, oh, Prince, whether you want to or not! I order our immediate departure.

-I will not resist, I will not interfere with the command of my father. It is night, brothers, and we are all tired. Let us rest this night, and then we can go back tomorrow.

Being joyful that they had found Rastko and convinced him to return without great pain, having enjoyed a good dinner and the wine they were served, the soldiers fell into a deep sleep.

And while the soldiers, tired and drunk slept a deep, Rastko had already prepared with the Abbot to use the night before them to do what they had come for.

That night, in the high tower across the way from the monastery church, the Abbot tonsured the Prince's head and clothed him in the black cassock giving him the name Savva.

Great confusion and fear overcame the soldiers when they awoke early in the morning. And they had something to see -from the tower, the young monk Savva calmed them asking their forgiveness.

-My dear brothers, take this clothing and take it away to my father and ask him to forgive me. Tell my beloved father not to mourn for me. Christ, our greatest love, will be our comfort. Take this lock of hair to my mother, may it always remind her of Savva. The sinful servant of God, monk Savva, loves you all.

With the soft thud of the horse's hooves, the column of dejected soldiers left through the large monastery gate, above which rose the high tower of the monastery fortification. Their faces were pale and confused, no one even had the strength to say anything, they were all depressed. They behaved as if they were captured soldiers in a lost battle.

An indescribable sorrow and hurt overcame everyone at the Court of Serbia. A cemetery-like silence and torment abided in the souls of all the courtiers for days.

In the meantime, on the Holy Mountain, Savva, as a young monk, preserved in all of the daily responsibilities of life in a monastery. He strove to be the first in obedience to all of the brothers in the monastery. He especially loved to repeat to himself the words that Christ spoke to His disciples: *"Whoever want to be the first, let him be the last of all and a servant to everyone"* (Mark 9: 35).

He often spent the entire night in prayer, forsaking sleep, kneeling before the icons in his cell. He generally went barefoot, so that his feet were often soaked in blood. And he did all of this from love toward God and his neighbors. Soon everyone in all of the monasteries learned of the young monk, the former prince from Serbia.

When the Feast of the Most-holy Birthgiver of God, Annunciation, arrived, the Abbot of the monastery Vatoped, in the custom of the Holy Mount, invited the honorable monk Savva to the pious celebration. The Abbot and brothers of Vatoped, with the acquiescence of the Prot of the Holy Mount, convinced Savva, who liked the monastery, to stay in Vatoped.

Years passed and the aged Grand Duke Stefan Nemanya, having been persuaded by Savva, handed the throne over to his son Stefan. The older son, Vukan received the regions of the Adriatic coast to rule. Nemanya was then tonsured a monk and went to the monastery of Studenica, which he had founded, and from then on lived as the monk Simeon. His wife, already the nun Anastasia, went to the monastery of the Holy Birthgiver of God at Kursumlia, dedicating her whole life to God. For a long time Savva asked his father to come to him.

After spending eighteen months of the monastic life in the monastery Studenica, Simeon finally fulfilled the desire of his heart and that of his beloved child. More than tens years passed since Savva had left his parents. He anxiously waited for the meeting with his father. The day came with immeasurable joy. In the monastery of Vatoped the meeting of father and son was touching. Savva fell on his knees kissing his father's hands and garb, embracing him and weeping. They both wept.

-Stand up, my beloved child, stand up. Oh, most beautiful head of you father. Oh, my boy's hair. My dearest hands. Embrace me my child. My most-pure tear. Comfort my heart pains.

The news of the arrival of the powerful ruler to the peninsula of the Mother of God, now the modest old man, the monk Simeon, moved all of those to the holy mountain. They came to see the miracle of the Mother of God - former the great warrior and ruler of the Serbian lands, came as a monk. The monk Simeon in his old age behaved with dignity and modesty. Father and son gave gold and church vessels in a silver dance to all of the holy monasteries of the Holy Mountain. They endowed Vatoped with royal gifts and church utensils.

Savva, who even before his father's arrival was constantly building and renewing the monastery of Vatoped, built a refectory for the use of Serbian monks and novices.

Father and son received from Serbia abundant gifts for the monasteries and monks of the Holy Mountain. Savva relished the old foundation of the deserted monastery of Hilander and the area around it and proposed to his father that they build a Serbian monastery for future monks from Serbia, that it may be their acquisition, as well as the acquisition of all Serbians who come to the Holy Mountain. Because of the high standing of which father and son enjoyed, they quickly received permission from the Byzantine Emperor and Patriarch of Constantinople.

A short time later a most beautiful monastery church, with rooms and towers, was built. After its completion, Savva and Simeon moved into it from the Greek monastery as if into their own home. A multitude of Serbian monks from the Holy Mountain settled in the new monastery.

Shortly thereafter, already in deep old age, sensing that the time was approaching to exchange earthly fatherland for the heavenly one, Simeon, just like any other humble monk, prepared for the transition. He traded the sadness, due to the separation from his beloved child and the monks of Hilandar, for the joy of the approaching meeting with his beloved Lord.

Calling all the monks and taking his leave from them, he asked them: My beloved children, forgive and pray constantly. Live in peace, rejoice in the Lord. The final farewell with his son was touching and painful.

-My dearest child. Bless me, a sinner. Forgive me, my child.

-Pain and sorrow rend my heart, father.

-Be comforted, son, by our Resurrected Lord.

-My comfort will be our meeting in the Kingdom of God, my dearest father.

-Bless me, your sinful child, father. Confirm our brothers and people to live in love and harmony. Forgive me!

-The Abbots of the Holy Mountain and their monks prepared to receive the blessing and forgiveness of the most-wonderful Elder. The modest monk Simeon, on a bed of cut grass, with a rock under his head and before an icon of the Mother of God, surrendered his soul to his Lord.

After Simeon's death, the situation in Serbia became very grave. Vukan made war against his brother Stefan, desiring to take his throne. The clashes were terrible. The people suffered and perished.

Stefan called Savva to come and bring their father's body, which was shown to be holy soon after his death. From it flowed holy myrrh. Savva soon took the body of his father to Serbia and over his holy body reconciled his brothers. The Serbian state again grew strong.

After these great events, Savva returned to the Holy Mountain and to his isposnica, in the center of the Holy Mountain - Kareja - where he lived a strict, ascetic life, for which he had earlier written rules, called Tipik, concerning how Serbian monks should live in this isposnica, what prayers they should read every day, how to eat and how to fight against sin. Immediately after Simeon's death, Savva wrote his father's life and even earlier had written the rules for monastic life in Studenica.

And how were things in Serbia? Very bad! Roman Catholics - Latins - in their crusades to the East, penetrated and looted Orthodox countries, while the Bogomils (Manichean heretics), a sect from the East, penetrated into Serbia from Asia through Bulgaria. The church in Serbian lands was at that time under the authority of the Greek archbishop and priests of the Archbishopric of Ohrid. The people did not have their own bishops or priests who could protect them from false teaching and teach them true faith. Because of a great injunction of the people and the Grand Duke Stefan, monk Savva went to Constantinople and transferred the capital city to Nicea, in Asia Minor. Savva besought the Patriarch and Emperor an independent Church for his people.

As a ruler's son, the monk Savva was received by everyone with splendor. He received independence for the Serbian Church from the Patriarch and Emperor. At the insistence of the Emperor Theodore Lascaris and Patriarch Manuel Sarantenos, Savva was consecrated the first Serbian Archbishop, independently administered the Serbian Church appointing Serbians as bishops and priests. As the center of the first Serbian Archbishopric, St. Savva, with his brother Grand Duke Stefan, built a new monastery - Zicha - to serve as the future center of both the church and state.

On Spasovdan - the feast of the Ascension - in the year 1221, Zicha was ceremoniously consecrated and then Archbishop Savva crowned his brother Stefan the first Serbian King. At the Sabor (assembly) in Zicha, he gave a sermon to all of the people, confirming them in the Orthodox Faith: - God in the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit in the Church of God, with His Saints is wonderful unto the ages of ages. Christ is the Way, Truth and Life for all of our people.

By crowning his brother the first Serbian King, Archbishop Savva also founded the Serbian State, which was constantly threatened by the Pope of Rome and the surrounding Roman-Catholic States. St. Savva continuously fought to protect the country of his fathers from such assaults, to which Stefan occasionally succumbed. In 1228, King Stefan died in the arms of his brother Savva, who had tonsured him a monk, giving him a name Simon, on his deathbed. His body was taken to the

monastery of Studenica and buried next to his father, and his oldest son Radoslav was named his successor.

The authority of St. Savva in the Church and state was of great and decisive importance. Stefan's successors - Radoslav and Vladislav - frequently fell under the influence of their wives, who were foreigners. Radoslav was dethroned by his brother Vladislav. With such a state of disarray, with battles and disorder, St. Savva could not be satisfied. Soon thereafter he went on his first pilgrimage, visiting all of the holy places in Palestine and the Holy Mountain of Sinai.

As a Prince of Church, St. Savva was affectionately received by everyone. Visiting all of the holy places where the feet of the Lord passed, he gave gifts to the churches, monasteries and people. St. Savva returned to his country through Constantinople and Bulgaria. Soon after his return he appointed a successor to himself - the most worthy among the most worthy. God, through St. Savva, revealed the young, but virtuous, monk Arsenius.

Soon thereafter, St. Savva went on his second pilgrimage, again to the holy places in Palestine, Sinai and the Near East. Traveling to Jerusalem through Egypt Savva met many rulers and people, confirming friendship with them. Passing through Sinai, the Mountain on which Moses received God's Ten Commandments, Savva visited all of the holy places where the feet of our Lord Jesus Christ passed. He visited the ancient biblical city of Jerusalem, and by way of Armenia and Byzantium arrived at the Bulgarian capital - Trnovo.

During the night between January 13 and 14, 1236, not having returned to his own country, the first Serbian Archbishop and enlightener, St. Savva, died. In a foreign country he surrendered his soul to the Lord and was buried in the church of the Holy Forty Martyrs - the benefactor of the Emperor Asen. Great sorrow and pain spread throughout the entire Serbian and Bulgarian lands.

Savva's nephew, Vladislav, sought from his father in law, King Asen, permission to take Savva's body, but the Bulgarians were not willing to surrender so easily the body of the great, well-pleasing servant of God and new Saint, who was a great blessing from God. Only when King Vladislav personally went to the court of his father in law did he receive the body of his uncle. When they opened the grave, they looked upon a whole and incorrupt body. The entire church was filled with an indescribably pleasant fragrance. Vladislav took the relics of his uncle and transferred them to Serbia. Archbishop Arsenius, with a multitude of priests, state dignitaries and an immense multitude of people, met the Saint's body and with great honor, buried in Milieshevo.

Many healings of pious people who asked his help occurred above his body. In the year 1594, Sinan Pasha burned the body of St. Savva on the hill called Vrchar near Belgrade. He burned the holy body, but not the spirit of St. Savva, who remains with his people to this very day. St. Savva, even today, fondly looks down from heaven upon all Serbian children and calls his much-suffered people to peace, love and harmony. - "Come, children, listen to me, I will teach you the fear of the Lord".

The Serbian people are forever born by St. Savva.

The church of Serbia, as well as its State and School are Savva's work.

**Holy St. Sava,
Pray Unto God For Us!
Glory Be To God For All Things!**