



The Holy Seven Youths (the Seven Sleepers) of Ephesus: Maximilian, Jamblicus, Martinian, John, Dionysius, Eksakustodian (Constantine) and Antoninus

The Seven Youths of Ephesus: Maximilian, Jamblicus, Martinian, John, Dionysius, Eksakustodian (Constantine) and Antoninus lived in the 3rd century. Saint Maximilian was the son of the governor of Ephesus, the remaining six boys - sons of other noble citizens of Ephesus.



Young men had been friends since childhood, and all were military men. When the emperor Decius (249-251) came to Ephesus, he ordered all citizens to come to sacrifice to pagan gods; tortures and death expected the recalcitrants. Denounced by people who curried favour with the emperor, the seven youths of Ephesus were also called to response to him. Brought before the emperor, the holy youths confessed their faith in Christ.

The tokens of their military ranks, the belts, were immediately taken off them. However, Decius sent them away to freedom, hoping they would change the decision for a time while he was on the march. The youths left the city and hid in a cave in the Ohlon mountain, where they spent time in prayers, preparing for martyrdom. The youngest of them - holy Jamblicus, dressed in beggar's rags, walked to the town and bought bread.

The Cave of the Seven Sleepers, Ephesus

During one of such visits of the town, he heard that the emperor had returned and was looking for them to submit to the court. Saint Maximilian encouraged his friends to leave the cave and appear voluntarily in court. Having learnt where the young men were hiding, the emperor ordered to wall up the cave entrance with stones so that the young men would die of hunger and thirst. Two of the noblemen presented at the entrance walling up were secret Christians. They wanted to preserve the memory about the saints and placed a sealed casket among the stones with two pewter plates. The names of the seven youths and the

circumstances of their suffering and death were written on them.

But the Lord sent a wonderful dream to the young men which lasted nearly two centuries. By that time the persecution of Christians ceased, although during the reign of the Saint Blessed Emperor Theodosius (408-450) there were heretics who rejected the resurrection of the dead in the Last Judgement of our Lord Jesus Christ. Some of them said: *"How can there be resurrection of the dead, when there will be no soul, no body, because they will have been destroyed?"* Others stated: *"Only the souls will get retribution, because it is impossible for the bodies to rise up and revive after thousands of years when there will not be even dust of them."* It was then when God revealed the secret of the anticipated resurrection of the dead and of the hereafter life through His seven young men.

The owner of land where the Ohlon mountain was began a stone building, and the workers dismantled the entrance to the cave. Our Lord brought the young men to life, and they woke up as if from ordinary sleep, unaware that almost 200 years had passed. Their bodies and clothes were perfectly incorruptible. Getting ready to torment the young men entrusted again St. Jamblicus to buy bread in the city to refresh themselves. Approaching the town, the young man was amazed to see the holy cross on the town gates. Having heard the name of Jesus Christ freely uttered, he began to doubt that he had come to his city. When he was paying for the bread the holy young man handed a coin with the image of the Emperor Decius and was arrested and accused of hiding a treasure of ancient coins.

Saint Jamblicus was taken to the governor, who at that time was together with the Bishop of Ephesus. While listening to replies of the bewildered young man, the Bishop realized that God was revealing a secret through him, and he himself went along with the people to the cave. At the entrance of the cave Bishop pulled out of the heap of stones the sealed casket and opened it. He read the names of the seven youths written on the plates and the circumstances of the cave walling up at the behest of the emperor Decius. When everybody entered the cave and saw the young men alive, they all rejoiced and understood that God, through their awakening from long sleep, revealed the secret of Resurrection from the dead to the Church.

Soon the emperor himself came to Ephesus and spoke with the youths in the cave. Then the saint youths bent their heads to the ground in front of everyone and fell asleep again, that time till the general resurrection. The emperor wanted to put each of the young men in a precious shrine, but the saint youths appeared to him in a dream and said to leave their bodies on the ground in the cave. In the 12th century Russian pilgrim Abbot Daniel saw these relics of the seven youths in the cave.

Days of Remembrance: August 4. The second day of the seven youths' remembrance is October 22. According to one tradition that went into the Russian Prologue, the young men fell asleep again on that day. According to a note on Greek Minei, 1870, for the first time they fell asleep on August 4, but awoke on October 22. The Holy youths are also mentioned in the service of the Church New Year - September 1.

Source: <http://www.varnamonastery.bg/de7sv.html>