

THE LIFE OF THE GREAT MARTYR SAINT MINAS

“We went through fire and through water; but thou broughtest us into a wealthy place” (Psl, 66,12)

Saint Minas was born in Egypt in the middle of the 3rd century. His parents were heathen, yet the heathen family atmosphere did not harden his heart. Minas became Christian, when he was still in his teens. When he came of age, he opted for the military career. His unit stationed in Cotyaeion in Asia Minor. Minas excelled in wisdom and courage and therefore he stood high in officer's estimation.



But unfortunately three centuries after the Advent, people didn't wish to accept the redemptive message of Christ's resurrection. The Roman authorities began again "to kick against the pricks" (Act 26,14) Diokletian and Maximian, the emperors of Rome, ordered persecutions of the Christians, which lasted from 303 to 311. The Roman soldiers were ordered to arrest and to torment the Christians in order that they recant. That was the critical moment of Saint's life, but his faith prevailed upon the worldly reason. He left the army, he retired to a solitude in the mountains and he led an ascetic's life. He preferred the wild animal's company rather than the pagan's one. He wandered "in deserts and in mountains and in dens and caves of the earth" (Hebr. 11,38) and served God by fasting, vigils and prayer.

In time, he presented himself at a pagan festival in the midst of the populace, and fearlessly denounced the idols and declared himself as a Christian. For this he was arrested and drugged at the prefect's feet. He spoke to him quite frankly, he disclosed his name, his origin and his military past and of course he demonstrated courageously his Christian faith. The day after he was led again before the prefect Pyrrhus, who accused him of insulting the gods and of deserting. Saint Minas did not deny the accusations following the Evangelist Matthew who writes: "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the the soul" (Matt. 10,28). Respecting his age, the prefect tried to dissuaded him from his faith. When he did not manage to change his mind, Pyrrhus threatened him and then ordered to be subjected to torture. He was cruelly scourged and put to torture. Saint Minas grinned and bore it. Some of his comrades-in-arm instigated him to sacrifice to the idols and they said that his God will justify him because of the tortures he was subjected. The saint flatly refused to do this and he said that he laid down his life for Jesus Christ, who strenghten his decision to bear the pain. The prefect admired the felicity and the wisdom of the saint's answers and he asked him how could he speak in this way, given that he was a tough soldier. Saint Minas replies that Christ

endowed his martyrs with this ability, as he had promised "And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and unto powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say. For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say" (Luk. 12,11-12).

Finally he was beheaded. Before his execution, Saint Minas asked of some cryptochristians to carry his dead body to Egypt. The executioners lit a fire to cremate his dead body. Some faithful retrieved part of his relics and gave them honorable burial near Lake Mareotis near Alexandria in Egypt. According to the tradition the camel, which carried the sacred body, stopped at that place. So the Christians understood that it was God's will the relics of Saint Minas to be buried there.

Thousands of pilgrims came to the grave in the desert of Mareotis. A beautiful basilica was erected by the Emperor Constantine the Great.

Within a few years a cluster of buildings was erected, which was composed of two churches, a monastery, guests' houses and other buildings.

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