

St. Agathangelos the New Righteous Martyr of Esphigmenou - Martyred on April 19th, 1819

"Who will hear, without tearing and being touched, the glorious and devout martyrdom of the Saint Martyr and New Martyr Agathangelos, with which God, Orthodoxy, our Nation and, especially, our Venerable Monastery, which prepared him for the praised triumph, were praised.

The Saint came from the town Ainos in Thrace from poor but devout parents and was named Athanasios in the holy Baptism.

Because of his poverty, he assumed duty on some Turk's ship in order to earn a living. Seeing the virtues and the skillfulness of Athanasios, the impure Turk thought of turning him to [Islam] in order to make him his heir. Knowing, though, the stability and the devoutness of the young man, and that with flattery he could not convince him, he kept his purpose a secret so that he could use violent means. While, once, they were travelling from Constantinople to Smyrna, the unlawful judge of the Hagarines of Smyrna, seeing, as well, the willingness and the diligence of Athanasios, he was prodding the captain to try in every way to make him change faith. As soon as they arrived in Smyrna, the same night, the Hagarine ordered Athanasios to light a lantern and to walk ahead of him, allegedly going to some place. While they were walking on a street next to Turkish graves, he ordered the young man to get inside the Turkish cemetery and when they walked deeper inside, the impure Turk pulled a knife and, allegedly, trying to kill him, he injured him pretty seriously. The young man was surprised and he was pleading him with fear and wailings, however, he responded that it was impossible to let him live unless he becomes of the same faith. The young man thought that the testimony of that Turk was not valid because everyone knew him for a liar, so he said to himself: "let me say this word in order to save myself from this cruel man and, tomorrow, I'll deny it and I'll leave". This was Satan's trap, in order to abjure. As soon as he told him that will become an Ottoman, that impious man immediately kissed him and gave him an Ottoman name and at the same time of midnight, he dragged him to the judgment place and they didn't let him go until they circumcised him as well. A few days later, he got very sick and he was sad because he was afraid he would die in disrespect but God pitied him. After many hardships and dangers, he left his master, who almost killed him, for a financial dispute, though; since then, he started rising from the depth of impiety and he was using his Christian name.



St. Agathangelos the New Hieromartyr

After he was rescued from many dangers with the help of God, he came to Mount Athos and, first, he visited some monasteries and sketes, where he confessed to many confessors asking for refuge; later,

following the advice of a righteous confessor, he came to the holy Monastery of Esphigmenou, where the father superior Euthemios welcomed him, after he confessed him and learned his whole story. By him, he was appointed “trapezaris”, that is to say to serve in the table of the fathers, where he served with great willingness.

The devil brought him many and hard-to-say temptations and imaginations, but Athanasios, through confession and prayer, he was beating the meddler, by calling upon the Lord and the Virgin Mary. One day, while serving in a place where there was smoke, his eyes hurt and went to his cell, where he started crying saying: “The woe is to me, that if I can not tolerate such a little pain, how can I endure the martyrdom?” He prayed for a long time with big genuflections and, afterwards, when he slept, he saw Virgin Mary in a dream, who said to him: “Why, my child, are you sad and anxious?” The saint said: “How can I not be sad, the rascal, when, apart from my other sins, I denied my Lord?” The Virgin Mary said to him: “Have courage, my child, for you will enjoy the desired martyrdom.” He narrated all these to his teacher, Germanos, who was appointed by the father superior in order to instruct him and to receive his thoughts. The father superior sent Germanos to the Patriarch, Gregorios V, who was a hermit then at the Monastery of Iviron and he reassured that all these come from God and wished Athanasios to finish with the martyrdom, after he prepared himself until the end of the Holy Lent.

When the Holy Lent came, under the order of the father superior, they went with Germanos to the Skete of Iviron on order for Athanasios to be prepared by the monk Grigorios, who had formerly prepared the Saint Martyrs Euthemios, Ignatios, Akakios and Onouphrios. There, they [venerated] their holy Relics, which when Athanasios saw them, his soul rejoiced and was heated more in the martyrdom. After they returned to the Monastery of Esphigmenou, he started preparing with great struggles, fasting and prayer. On the order of the father superior, he locked himself up in the north tower and everyday he did one thousand five hundred big [prostrations] and another four thousand small ones. Before that, his confessor read him the merciful prayers for eight days and, in the end, he anointed him with the Holy Oil. In the Fourth Sunday of the Lent, he received the cloth of the Monks in the [Liturgy] and was named Agathangelos.

After he received the Holy Communion, he returned to the tower. His face changed and lit up and heavenly flame lit in his heart, which urged him to more struggles. He also found a chain which weighed more than 25 lbs. and tied himself up to the skin like a true Esphigmenos (tied-up); also, he wore a sack made of hair and he increased the [prostrations] until he exceeded the three thousand big ones and eight thousand small ones. He was reading the Salutations of the Virgin Mary two times a day, the Gospel, the New Martyrology and other books, praying with Jesus prayer and desiring death with all his soul for Christ.

Not being able to hold his desire for martyrdom, he was pleading the father superior to send it him as soon as possible. The father superior advised the brothers to pray in order for God to reveal if this is His will and on the same night, the father superior saw Saint Nicholas, who was saying to Agathangelos: “You desired good work, so hurry and you will prosper”. Since then, the final preparations for it started.



Icon of St. Agathangelos the New Righteous Martyr, holding the Precious Cross and an icon of Christ's Resurrection

By divine dispensation, on the Holy Saturday, a ship from Chios, which was travelling for Smyrna, arrived in front of the Monastery. In the evening of Easter Monday, the father superior dressed Agathangelos with the great and angelic Schema and the brothers saluted him with tears, praying to the Lord to help him with the struggle of physical exercise. Agathangelos and Germanos boarded the ship and, on St. Thomas Sunday, they arrived to Smyrna. Next Thursday, after they shaved him, they dressed him with Turkish [clothes] and gave him in his hands a wooden cross and an icon with the Resurrection of Christ. Later, he came to the judgment place of the impious people, he was asked what he wanted and said that he had a difference with his former master. They invited that Turk and asked Agathangelos and what is the difference that he had with him. The Saint replied with courage: “When that man hired me to work for him, I was a Christian. He made me a Turk by force but I am a Christian again and I believe in Jesus Christ, which I avow as true God”. The Hagarines that were there started scolding him and, then, he pulled the Cross and the icon of the Resurrection of Christ out of his clothes and raised them, he was preaching Christ again and condemned their impure religion. For a long time, they were flattering him promising many earthly possessions, but the martyr was silent and he was praying. After the flatteries, they started the big threats and the tortures and, afterwards, they sent him to the governor. He used similar ways and because the confessor stayed firm in his confession, they put him in prison.

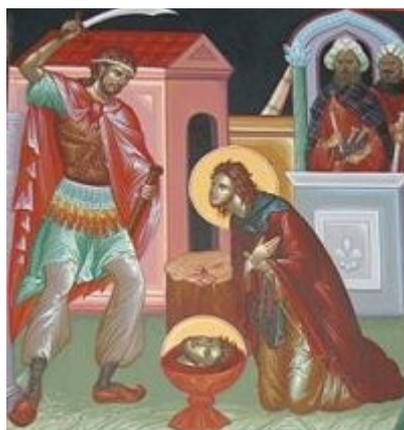


St. Agathangelos the New Martyr depicted being held by the Resurrected Christ

The next day, they led him again at the judgment place and on the way they were threatening him with the sword, but he probably desired the sword. They led him again in front of the judge and the governor and they didn't manage anything with bigger promises and threats because the confessor wasn't even listening to them, but he was saying the blessing and was preaching Jesus as true God, so they threw him again tied up in prison. He, then, heard there in prison that the Christians were interceding for his acquittal and immediately wrote a letter pleading and imploring them to God not to act in this way, but to let the impious people torture him as they wanted and for the Christians only to pray that God would help him in his road. When this letter was read in front of the bishop and the elders, they all praised God in tears and letters of the father superior Euthemios, who was also pleading that the Christians were praying for the athlete, were read. Indeed, according to the bishop's and clergymen's advice, the Christians had a long prayer that night, praying in tears.

The next day, the executioners grabbed him and brought him to the place of martyrdom. Until the last moment, the servants of fallacy did not stop trying to distort him, but he wasn't even listening to them

and he was only praying “Lord Jesus Christ Son of God, have mercy on me”. He was [beheaded] on the fifth hour of Saturday, April 19th, 1819.



Icon of the Martyrdom of St. Agathangelos

Who can, however, narrate the joy and the elation that the Christians felt with the Martyr's winning and the glory of God? They were glorifying God and were praising the Martyr and they were saying “We have tried many times various joys at times, but this joy that we got from the martyrdom of the Saint, not only have we never felt it, but neither can we express it with words”. The Martyr's body, which worked miracles and gave off a sweet smell since it was still in the place of martyrdom, was placed, according to a testimony, in the grave of the Saint New Martyr Dimos in Smyrna.

According to another version, though, the Saint's venerable relics were thrown to the precinct of the Church of Saint George of Smyrna. The Great Ekonomos Constantine from Ekonomoi, who was then (1808-1809) staying there as a Teacher of the celebrated School of Smyrna, was notified and went down to the Church, the precinct of which communicated with the School, and the sight of the holy relics of the martyr of Christ and of the Nation, instead of the “Come for the last kiss” [*the final hymns of the Orthodox funeral service, when the people embrace the departed for the last time*], he composed the following hymn:

“The crowd of the people of Smyrna lets glorify with songs our protector and the shoot of Ainos, who he fights, the warm and good holy martyr Agathaggelos. Because he confronted bravely the unfavorable and he defeated him. For that, he is among the martyrs in the sky having a crown on his head and he prays for us to the only philanthropos” (27, “Thrakika” Volume 10, p. 376)

[«Πληθὺς ἡ τῶν Σμυρναίων ἐν ὠδαῖς εὐφημήσωμεν ἡμῶν πολιούχον καὶ τῆς Αἴνου τὸ βλάστημα, πρόμαχον θερμὸν Ἀγαθάγγελον ἱερομάρτυρα ἐσθλόν· ἐπλάκη γὰρ γενναίως τῷ δυσμενεῖ καὶ τούτον κατηκόντισεν. ὅθεν στεφηφορῶν οὐρανομάρτυσι συναγάζεται ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν ἐξευμενίζων τὸν μόνον φιλόνηρον»(27. «Θρακικά» Τόμος 10ος, σ.376.)]

The holy relics of the New Martyr Agathangelos were buried in the precinct of the Church of Saint George of Smyrna in the root of the perennial plane-tree and his grave was saved until the Asia Minor Catastrophe in 1922."



Another icon of St. Agathangelos the New Righteous Martyr, holding the Precious Cross and an icon of Christ's Resurrection

"From the holy relics of the Saint Martyr Agathangelos, in the Monastery there are the left hand and foot, one [rib] and the skull.

Like it is mentioned in the letter of February 19th 1884 of the Church-wardens of the Church of saint George of Smyrna and its Elders, sealed with the seal of the Common of the city of Smyrna and the seal of Church of saint George, it is made known and verified with the signature of the [Metropolitan] of Smyrna Athanasios: "that according to the just application of the Father Superior Agathangelos Priest-monk, together with his colleagues from the Monastery of Esphigmenou, with a letter that was published on February 10th, gave to the emissary there, the venerable Makarios, the left hand and foot, one [rib] and the skull of the New Martyr Saint Agathangelos, who was beheaded in this town, and which undoubtedly and unhesitatingly genuine Relics of the passed away New Maryr etc".

(taken from: http://www.esphigmenou.gr/index_en.php?mid=3&sid=5)