

A HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE TRANSLATION OF
THE RELICS OF SAINT NICHOLAS, ARCHBISHOP OF
MYRA

(May 9/22)

About the Transferral of the Saint's Holy Relics to Bari, and
About Gaining and Retaining the Favor of God and His Saints

Brothers and sisters!

Today is the feast of the translation of the relics of Christ's great hierarch and wonderworker Nicholas. On this day, the holy remains, which were removed from Myra in modern Asiatic Turkiye, arrived in Bari in southern Italy. This is the patronal feast of our neighboring little convent of Saint Nicholas, but we are celebrating it here, as the church there is not ready for use. I will begin my word to you today by relating

in brief the story of the translation of the relics, then remind you how to gain and retain the favor of God and His saints.

In the year 1071, the Seljuk Turks inflicted a devastating defeat on the Byzantine Army at the Battle of Manzikert in Armenia. The chief result of this was that the Turks quickly overran almost all of Asia Minor, including Myra, where Saint Nicholas had been archbishop many centuries earlier and where his relics were buried beneath the marble tiles of the cathedral floor.

One night shortly after these catastrophes, the Lord's favorite appeared to a certain devout, respected presbyter of Bari and commanded him to tell the citizens to send men to Myra to fetch his relics. The presbyter announced this in church, and three ships set sail for Myra. Arriving there, the men of Bari proceeded to the cathedral, where they came upon four monks. When they removed the tiles and opened the holy Bishop's

coffin, they found it to be full of sweet-smelling myrrh. They loaded the honored relics onto one of the ships and, accompanied by two of the monks, returned to Bari, where they were greeted by the entire population. This took place on May 9, 1086. Many people were healed that day, and the sacred remains were deposited in the Church of the Holy Forerunner. Then construction of a magnificent cathedral dedicated to Saint Nicholas was quickly begun. Exactly three years later, upon completion of the new church, the relics were taken to it. They have been kept in the altar of that church until the present day, exuding no longer myrrh, but a clear liquid called “manna.”

Dear Christians, our beloved father Nicholas the saintly first shone upon the world from his hierarchal throne in Myra; his holy remains were transferred to Bari by a divine summons and remain there to this day; and his immortal soul dwells in Heaven, beside the throne of the Almighty. Nevertheless, he is

always near those who lead a Godpleasing life and with faith call upon his name. In him, pastors and teachers find a trustworthy guide; the sick, a healer; the afflicted, a deliverer; sinners, an intercessor before the Lord; the poor, a treasure; the sorrowful, a consoler; travellers, a guide; sailors, a helmsman. In every land and at all times, devout Christians turn to him in prayer, for they know by experience that Saint Nicholas eagerly hears prayer and comes to the aid of those who beseech his intercession. Great is Nicholas' compassion; wherefore, the Lord counts him as one of the foremost among the righteous, and to His righteous, the Lord grants a superabundance of grace. He quickens them with His Most Holy Spirit and enables them to hear our entreaties, to know our needs, and thus to assist us greatly, as it says in His Scriptures: *The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*¹

¹ James 5:16

And so, whenever and wherever we pray, let us remember that the righteous Nicholas sees and hears us, and is ready to help. Let us remember to call upon him before the others as the greatest of wonderworkers, and let us strive to make ourselves worthy of his intercessions. For the saints, living in God and having God living in themselves, truly know not just what we ask, but what we think, say, and do. They know this much more fully now, when they are in Heaven, than they did when they were living on earth. They know our virtuous thoughts, words, and deeds, as well as our sinful ones; they are observing us all the time. This means that if we are committing grievous sins and do not repent of them, they may turn away from our prayer. And be assured also that even if we somehow manage to retain the saints as intercessors under these circumstances, the Lord may very well refuse to hearken unto their prayers. To adduce but a single example of this, once, the Lord revealed to another

great saint, the mighty ascetic and stylite Symeon of the Wondrous Mountain, evils that were about to befall Antioch and its suburbs, and the venerable one began praying for the great city with his whole heart. Like a new Moses, he stood before the Lord, entreating Him to turn away His anger from the people. But then God announced to him directly, “Lo, by its iniquities, Antioch has moved Me to wrath; therefore, I will deliver it to a violent and barbarous nation which shall subject it to great slaughter.” No matter how long Saint Symeon continued to beseech God to spare the city, he could not quench the Lord’s righteous anger.

God forbid that either He or His saints abandon us in such a way on account of our sins and failure to repent!

Good Christians! Do you want the holy hierarch Nicholas and the other favorites of the Lord to remain always near you and to help you in every need, want, and sorrow? Who would

not want this! Then strive with all your strength not to anger God by unbecoming behavior of any sort, and if you nevertheless fall short of the mark, do not reconcile yourself to the lapse, but hasten to holy repentance! Amen.