

A HOMILY FOR THE FEAST OF THE HOLY GREATMARTYR GEORGE

About the Passion of the Trophybearer and How We Can Win a
Crown Like His

(April 23/May 6)

Brothers and sisters!

Today our Holy Orthodox Church observes a dual celebration: the Midfeast of Pentecost and the feast of Saint George, the prince of martyrs. For our mutual benefit, I would like to say a few words about the passion of Saint George and how we can win a crown like his.

The holy greatmartyr George was put to death at the beginning of the fourth century. At that time, the vicious persecutor Diocletian sat upon the throne of the Roman Empire.

On a single night he burned alive twenty thousand Christians in the great church of Nicomedia in Asia Minor. Once, when the tyrant was seated on his throne condemning Christians to death, the soldier George entered the assembly and began rebuking him for his cruelty. Diocletian responded by urging George to renounce Christ, but soon tired of George's refusals and had him imprisoned.

The next morning Diocletian had Saint George stripped naked and fastened to a wheel, beneath which boards studded with spikes were laid. When the wheel was turned, the spikes shredded the martyr's flesh. God, however, preserved the saint from death, and an angel freed the blessed one from the wheel. Seeing the saint alive and untied, the tyrant was amazed, but unrepentant. Meanwhile, two magistrates, Anatolius and Protoleon, who were already secret catechumens, at the sight of the miracle confessed Christ openly and were beheaded.

Likewise, Empress Alexandra, Diocletian's wife, was converted to Christ.

Next Diocletian buried Saint George in a pit of quicklime. After three days the tyrant's servants returned to remove the martyr's bones, but found that the lime had done him no harm at all. Then Diocletian had the saint shod in red-hot iron boots and driven by the lash back to prison, but the Lord healed the martyr again. At a loss what else to do, the Emperor summoned a magician and ordered him to poison Saint George. When his potion proved powerless against the saint, the magician, whose name was Athanasius, also believed in Christ and, like the magistrates, was beheaded. Finally, the Emperor proposed to George that if he would go with him to Apollo's temple and worship the false god, he would make the saint his chief assistant, but by his prayer the Lord's favorite hurled down all the idols in the temple, breaking them to pieces.

Defeated in every encounter with Christ's soldier,
Diocletian at the last had George beheaded. Because during his
passion he vanquished the vicious persecutor so repeatedly and
utterly, Saint George received from the Christians the title
"Trophybearer." This was a deserved appellation, for the holy
martyr won the victory over the most terrible of the ancient foes
of the Christian faith and over that evil man's lackeys as well.
For this, the wondrous George was rewarded with an
imperishable crown of glory in paradise.

Brothers and sisters, let us bend the knee of our hearts and
minds before Saint George's sufferings for Christ and marvel at
his constancy in the holy faith, for no torment could induce him
to worship the lifeless idols and betray the true and living God.
Likewise, as we celebrate his sacred feast, let us ask ourselves:
Do we possess unshakeable faith, such as did the holy
greatmartyr? Are we vanquishers of our foes, as the saint was of

his? For most surely, we have foes no less than he: terrible, invisible foes, Satan himself instead of Diocletian, and the throngs of Lucifer's servants – the wicked demons – instead of the Emperor's henchmen. Against these innumerable adversaries and our evil passions we must contend, not for a few days, but throughout our lifetime. As we do so, Christ looks down upon us as He did upon Saint George, waiting eagerly for us to triumph in the contest, so that He might crown us with the garland of victory as He did the great trophybearer.

How, beloved Christians, can we possibly prevail over such numerous, determined, persistent opponents and attain the victory and a celestial crown? Only by constant rebuttal of their sinful suggestions to us – suggestions that masquerade as our own thoughts; only by pursuit of Christian virtues, especially heartfelt prayer, and unflagging faith and hope in God. If we bring these to the contest, the Lord will provide His all-powerful

grace, enabling us to vanquish miraculously the demons and passions that torment us, as Saint George vanquished miraculously his foes and the physical tortures they inflicted. Thus we shall be shown to be trophybearers, conquerors of our oppressors: the world, the flesh, the devil, and his minions.

The arena is always open, dear Christians. Christ bids us enter and undertake the contest, and He eagerly awaits our triumph. He stands ready to take us into His arms on the day of our death and grant us the crown.

O holy greatmartyr George! Help us to imitate thee and to show ourselves champions of faith and piety – resolute contenders against the devil, his demons, and his temptations – that we, like thee, may win an imperishable garland of victory in the heavens. Amen.