Life of St Andrew Fool for Christ

Why this article

Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ is one of the best-known saints of the East — and, at the same time, one of the least understood. His feast, kept on October 2nd, is known to most Orthodox Christians chiefly through its link to the vision at Blachernae, the foundation of the feast of the Protection of the Mother of God. Beyond that central liturgical moment, however, his Life is seldom read in full, and his place within the Tradition of folly for Christ — the place, that is, in which one comes to understand what a *salos* is — remains unclear to most readers.

This article begins a series of three parts. The first part lays the foundation: what folly for Christ is, where it has its scriptural and patristic ground, why it holds so high a place in Orthodox Tradition, and how the Church distinguishes it from mere madness; then who Saint Andrew is according to the Life written by the priest Nicephorus, and how this Life was transmitted, from Constantinople down to us, through liturgical commemoration and through its Athonite translation into Romanian. The parts that follow will treat: the vision at Blachernae and the Protection of the Mother of God (Part II), and the apocalyptic section of the Life, with the discernment due to patristic prophecies (Part III).

> *"We are fools for Christ's sake… Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwellingplace… Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day."*
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> — Saint Paul the Apostle (1 Corinthians 4:10-13)

Hunger, thirst, nakedness, wandering, reviling, mockery, received with blessing: this is, word for word, the portrait of Saint Andrew on the streets of Constantinople — written by the Apostle Paul eight centuries before he was born. It is from this apostolic word that we set out, for in it is already contained, in seed, all that we shall say of folly for Christ.

The scriptural ground: the folly of the Cross

Folly for Christ is not an invention of later monasticism; it grows from a deep scriptural root: the word of the holy Apostle Paul concerning the folly of the Cross. The whole paradox of the *salos* phenomenon is already contained, in seed, in the opening chapters of the First Epistle to the Corinthians.

Paul sets down from the very beginning a reversal that will stand at the foundation of the entire ascetic struggle: "*For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God"* (1 Corinthians 1:18). What the world reckons folly — a crucified God, victory through defeat, glory through dishonour — is, for the faithful, the very saving power. And Paul carries the reversal to its limit: "*Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?"* (1:20), only to conclude: "*the foolishness of God is wiser than men"* (1:25).

Here lies the key. There are two wisdoms and two follies, set crosswise: the wisdom of the world, which before God is folly, and the "folly" of God, which is the true wisdom. The *salos* takes upon himself precisely this position: putting on visible folly before the world, he confesses that he has chosen the other wisdom. His folly played out in the marketplace is a living icon of the folly of the Cross — a scandal to them that perish, salvation to those who understand it.

And the verse from which we set out carries this reversal into the very flesh: "*We are fools for Christ's sake… we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling place… Being reviled, we bless… we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things"* (1 Corinthians 4:10-13). Paul here describes the apostolic life itself, but in terms that will become, letter for letter, the programme of the *salos*. He does nothing other than carry to an extreme, literal expression what the Apostle called the very condition of a servant of Christ.

For this reason the *salos* phenomenon, however unusual, is no exotic appendix to the Orthodox tradition, but a living-out to the very end of a central apostolic word. The fools for Christ took with full seriousness, down to the last consequence, what many Christians read without flinching. The first to embody this apostolic word in a complete Life, preserved whole, was Saint Simeon of Emesa, in the sixth century; Saint Andrew, across the centuries, treads the same path.

Why folly for Christ is one of the highest and harshest forms of Orthodox ascetic struggle

The encounter with the tradition of the fools for Christ — *saloi* in Greek, *iurodivye* in Russian — produces in most readers a first reaction of bewilderment. How is it that these men and women, who hid their holiness beneath an appearance of madness, sleeping in refuse and at the edges of roads, letting themselves be beaten, spat upon, and dragged through the streets, come to be honoured by the Church alongside the great teachers of the world, alongside martyrs and venerable ascetics? It seems a paradox. And yet, if we look closely at the teaching of the Fathers on humility, the paradox dissolves. Humility is, by consensual patristic witness, the foundation of all the virtues. Saint Anthony the Great, founder of Eastern monasticism, left the word that remains to this day the touchstone of the spiritual life: "*I saw all the snares of the enemy spread out over the earth, and groaning I said: who then can pass through these? And I heard a voice saying to me: humility."*1 The whole work of the enemy can be passed through by a single virtue, and that virtue is humility.

Abba Longinus reinforced the principle: humble-mindedness is greater than all good works, "*for it can draw a man up even from the depths of hell, though he be a sinner like a demon."*2 It is the foundation that upholds all the rest.

Moreover, the Fathers showed that humility is not obtained by reflection or by interior striving, but by **being actually humbled** and receiving that humbling without disturbance. Saint John Climacus, in Step 25 of the *Ladder*, gives the most precise definition: "*It is not he who disparages himself who shows humility; for who will not bear with himself? Rather it is he who, when reviled by another, does not diminish his love toward him."*3 Not self-disparagement, then, but the receiving of reviling from without without the love being shaken. And the same Father testifies to the effect: "*I have not fasted, nor kept vigil, nor lain on the bare ground; but I humbled myself, and the Lord speedily saved me."*4

Saint Isaac the Syrian comes still nearer to our subject. Speaking of the refining furnace of ascetic struggle, he names one by one the trials that produce "*the exalting humility*": "*hunger and thirst, nakedness and bodily illness, the onslaught of the passions,* ***reviling and dishonour****, distress and affliction, wounds, prison, the seizure of one's goods, constraint, restlessness, and every other circumstance found in the diversity of temptations… he will receive these, like gold in the crucible, that he may not lose the exalting humility, which can give to the diligent struggler cleansing from sins and the unfading crown of patience."*[5] Here, in Saint Isaac's list, reviling and dishonour stand alongside hunger and nakedness — not as different trials, but as instruments of the same purifying fire. They are the very same words — hunger, nakedness, reviling — that Paul also spoke; the ascetic struggle does nothing but receive them on purpose.

Abba Macarius the Egyptian, disciple of Saint Anthony and one of the loftiest fathers of the Egyptian desert, gave the plainest counsel to a brother who had asked him how to be saved. He sent him first to the graveyard to revile the dead, then the next day to praise them, and then he interpreted it for him: "*You see how much you said to them and they answered you nothing, and how much you praised them and they told you nothing. So too you, if you wish to be saved, make yourself dead; take no account either of the injustice or of the glory of men, as the dead do, and you will be able to be saved."*[6] This is, in concentrated form, the definition of the state the *salos* reaches: dead to reviling and dead to glory alike.

Abba Macarius learned this mystery from the very mouth of the devil. The enemy, unable to overthrow him, confessed that in all things he could imitate him — "*you fast, I too fast; you keep vigil, I do not sleep at all"* — save in one thing alone: the single thing he cannot imitate, and by which he cannot prevail over him, is humility.[7] Fasting, vigil, abstinence — all of these the devil can copy in a lying ascetic show. Humility, never.

Here lies, by the witness of Tradition, the singular ascent of the fools for Christ.

All the other ascetic labours — harsh fasting, all-night vigil, virginity, poverty, withdrawal into the desert — can be practised without receiving direct reviling from men. The harsh hermit is admired. The anchorite is venerated. The stylite is visited by pilgrims. Even poverty, when it is recognized as ascetic labour, draws the honour of those around. The *salos*, by contrast, sets himself programmatically in the path of reviling: day by day, hour by hour, until death. He does not seek it as an event, does not seek it as a trial, but makes it the very medium of his life. The Life of Saint Andrew puts it in a way that overturns expectation: he was dragged through the marketplaces with a rope round his neck, his face smeared with charcoal, struck with stones by children — not an incident, but his ordinary life. Saint Basil the Blessed of Moscow was insulted in the streets of the capital. Saint Xenia of Petersburg was mocked for forty years.

To this are added four deprivations which the *salos* receives all at once, as an ascetic labour of several layers:

Contempt coming from Christians themselves. For an ordinary believer, the church is a place of rest, the community a support. For the *salos*, the church itself is one more place of mockery: the Life of Saint Andrew describes how, on his entering Hagia Sophia, people would say "*How did the fool get in here?"* — unwanted even in the house of the Father. The contempt came alike from those who went to church and from those who did not, with no place of social rest.

Cold and hunger as a permanent ascetic labour, without rule. The monk's fast, however harsh, has a

rule, a time, a cell to which he returns. The *salos* does not know whether he will eat tomorrow, whether he will find somewhere to sleep, whether he will survive the winter. The Life of Saint Andrew describes the terrible winter in which he was nearly dead from cold, left outside even by the poor, like a dog — a daily martyrdom, lacking the crown of recognized martyrdom.

Good deeds done in secret. Saint Andrew would give the alms he received to other poor, but would scatter the coins on the ground so that the needy might gather them without knowing whose hand had given. He thus denied himself even the subtle joy that the ordinary religious man seeks: that of being known to do good.

The lack of community and friendship. Hermit life itself can be, against the hermit's will, encircled by fame: he who flees the world often ends up sought by the world, has a spiritual father, disciples, pilgrims. The *salos* chooses another path: not only withdrawal from the world's glory, but the active receiving of its contempt, in an isolation in the very midst of the city, without a word of admiration. Saint Andrew had only two people with whom he spoke without a mask: Nicephorus and Epiphanius. The rest, without exception, treated him as a madman.

And here enters the most precious point of our whole account.

The *salos* is, in a certain way, a hermit — but a hermit guarded, by his very ascetic labour, from the subtlest snare of the spiritual life: vainglory. Saint John Climacus, in Step 22, openly acknowledges that vainglory is found even in the desert, in the darkest caves; the change of place does not remove it. And Saint Ignatius Brianchaninov, in *On Delusion*, describes at length how even strugglers who have reached high measures fall into *prelest*, into the spiritual delusion by which they begin to see themselves as better than they are and to receive false visions, after which they go astray. The only real defence against this fall is, according to the Fathers, deep, sincere humility, exercised daily.

The *salos*, being humbled daily, being guarded from admiration, being prevented even from self-recognition — because he does not claim to be holy but, on the contrary, presents himself as possessed — is guarded by his very ascetic labour from the subtle snare of glory. He cannot believe of himself that he is someone, because the world tells him daily, through blows and spittle, that he is no one. And his heart, thus guarded, becomes a pure vessel of grace.

For this reason the Church saw in the *saloi* not a marginal anomaly, but an extreme form of self-denial: a rare path, perilous for those not called, yet radiant where God has shown it to be at work. Saint Basil the Blessed of Moscow would rebuke Tsar Ivan the Terrible without fear, for he had nothing to lose — neither reputation, nor position, nor human comfort. Saint Andrew would see the souls that rise or fall, would see the angels and demons that accompany men, was caught up to the third heaven like the Apostle Paul. Saint Xenia of Petersburg knew beforehand the death of some, the decisions of others. Not because they had the gifts by nature, but because **their heart became, through daily humility, a pure vessel of grace**.

It must be said, however, before going further, a thing decisive for our whole account. Folly for Christ is not an ascetic labour to be imitated at will, nor a psychological model of eccentric behaviour. It is a rare calling, perilous for the untested, recognized by the Church only by its fruits, by humility, by purity of faith, and by conciliar reception. To the criteria by which this distinction is made we shall return below.

The first to embody the apostolic word of folly for Christ in a complete Life, preserved whole, was Saint

Simeon of Emesa, in the sixth century; Saint Andrew, across the centuries, treads the same path. And he is not alone: let us first see the line in which he takes his place.

The world of the fools for Christ

The tradition of the *saloi* extends, in the Orthodox East, from the Egyptian desert of the fourth century down to today. Here are a few representative figures, in chronological order.

Saint Isidora of Tabennisi (4th c., Egypt). The earliest *salos* of whom we have written witness. She lived in the women's monastery at Tabennisi, in Upper Egypt. She was reckoned mad by all the other nuns and mocked daily. She would eat the leftovers from the sisters' table and hid her holiness so well that no one knew her. Saint Pitirim was sent by an angel to seek her out; when he arrived at the monastery and asked to see her, the nuns thought he was joking. Recognizing the honour being shown her, Isidora fled the monastery that very night, and no one ever learned where she died.8

Saint Simeon of Emesa (6th c., Syria). The first *salos* with a complete written Life — the first, that is, to give the phenomenon a full form, preserved whole. His Life was written by Saint Leontius, bishop of Neapolis in Cyprus, in the seventh century. Simeon first lived twenty-nine years as a hermit in the desert near the Dead Sea, together with his friend Saint John, ascending to a high spiritual measure far from the eyes of the world. Then, judging himself sufficiently strengthened, he asked of God a still harder ascetic labour: to return to the world and serve the salvation of men, hiding his perfection beneath the mask of folly. He bore himself in the city of Emesa in the most scandalous manner of all the *saloi*— overturning stalls, eating openly during the fast, performing deeds that turned everyone against him — all to draw reviling upon himself. Yet beneath this covering he laboured unceasingly: he turned harlots to repentance, cast out demons, secretly helped those in need, foretold an earthquake that was to strike the city. His work remained unknown until near his death; only after his repose was it discovered who he had been.9His Life was the literary model upon which, three centuries later, the hagiographer of Saint Andrew drew — and Saint Andrew himself, as we shall see, will ask to be laid to rest beside him.

Saint Andrew of Constantinople (10th c.). The saint whose Life is the subject of this series. A Scythian by birth brought as a slave to Constantinople, taught letters, called in a vision to take upon himself folly for Christ. He lived on the streets of the imperial capital, sleeping with the dogs, eating half a rusk a day or nothing, mocked by all and close to none — except his spiritual father Nicephorus and the young Epiphanius, the future patriarch. To him the Mother of God appeared, covering the faithful with her omophorion in the church of Blachernae, a vision that is the foundation of the feast of the Protection. He is the subject of Parts II and III of this series.

Saint Basil the Blessed of Moscow (1469-1557). A Russian *iurodivy* in the time of Tsar Ivan IV the Terrible. He went naked through the streets of Moscow winter and summer, overturned the stalls of certain merchants who, it later came to light, were selling deceitful goods — bread mixed with lime and chalk, ill-made kvass — and would bow before the walls of the houses of the licentious. When the Tsar asked him why he did so, he answered that on the merchants' stalls there were demons, while at the walls of the houses of the licentious the angels were weeping. Tradition says that Ivan the Terrible feared him as he did no other man. At his burial, in 1557, the Tsar himself bore his coffin. The Cathedral of the Protection on Red Square, popularly known as "Saint Basil's," came to be linked with his name through

the strong veneration of the saint.[10]

Saint Xenia of Petersburg (c. 1731-after 1803). The widow of an officer of the imperial court, after her husband's death she distributed her wealth to the poor, took the name of her dead husband (Andrei Feodorovich), and put on his clothes. She walked for forty years through the streets of Petersburg, speaking to others as though she herself were Andrei and Xenia had died. She was mocked by nobles and poor alike. She foretold the death of the Empress Elizabeth, secretly helped in the building of churches, and knew the hearts of those who came to her. She was canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in 1988 and is today one of the most beloved saints of the Slavic world.[11]

Saint Gabriel Urgebadze (1929-1995, Georgia). A *salos* of the twentieth century. He lived under the atheist Soviet regime, built a church from materials salvaged from ruins, and was imprisoned and tortured. After his release, he took upon himself folly for Christ: he assumed the appearance of drunkenness and scandalous conduct, in order to hide his inner labour and to draw the world's contempt upon himself, entering with difficulty the official churches that collaborated with the Soviet apparatus of religious control. Yet he too healed the sick, comforted the despairing, and knew the hearts of those who came to him. He was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church in 2012; his relics are today at the Samtavro monastery in Mtskheta, and are a place of pilgrimage for Orthodox of every jurisdiction.[12]

The tradition continues, hidden, down to today. Some of the greatest contemporary saints — Saint Tarso of Greece (20th c.), the venerable Pelagia of Diveyevo (19th c.) — belong to the same line. The *saloi* are not found, by their very nature, in the calendars of wide circulation; they remain hidden until death and discovered only afterward, if the Church discovers them. Many, very many, remain unknown to the end.

How the Church distinguishes folly for Christ from mere madness

Precisely because it is so unusual a path, the *salos* phenomenon has always been attended by a risk: that a sick man, an eccentric, or even one in delusion might be taken for a saint — or, conversely, that a true saint might be despised as a madman. The Church has never been naive in this regard.

A clear witness stands in a conciliar decision itself. Canon 60 of the Council in Trullo (the year 691) condemns those who "*feign themselves possessed by demons and, by depravity of conduct, pretend to be such,"* appointing for them the same severity as for those truly possessed.[13] In other words, the Church explicitly forbade the feigning of madness and possession. This may seem, at first sight, a condemnation of the *saloi* themselves. In reality, it shows how seriously the Church regarded the peril of false folly — and why it honoured, in the end, only a small number of *saloi*, recognized not by their scandalous conduct but by something altogether different.

For it is not bizarre conduct that makes someone a fool for Christ. Thousands of people have behaved scandalously without being saints. Saint Simeon of Emesa, of whom we spoke above, is the plain example: his conduct was the most scandalous of all the *saloi* — he ate openly during the fast and performed in full view of all deeds that turned everyone against him — and yet the Church honoured him, not for the outward signs, but for the hidden fruits that only a few knew: the repentance of harlots imperceptibly brought to Christ, the alms given in secret, the salvation of souls wrought without

witnesses. He shows with the greatest clarity the principle: not the outward sign, but the fruits. What the Church sought, when it honoured a *salos*, was never the outward sign, but the inner fruits: deep and steadfast humility; the absence of any seeking of self, of glory, or of advantage; the gift of discernment and of clairvoyance placed in the service of others' salvation, not of one's own fame; sacrificial love hidden beneath the mockery received; full conformity with right faith; and, above all, conciliar reception — that is, recognition, after death and after long examination, by the conscience of the whole Church.
For this reason folly for Christ cannot be imitated, proposed as a model, or chosen of one's own will. A Christian cannot "make himself" a *salos*, just as he cannot make himself a martyr by his own decision. It is a special calling, given by God to very few, proven by fruits and crowned by the recognition of the Church — never a spiritual technique within anyone's reach. Whoever would take scandalous conduct as a shortcut to holiness would fall into the very snare that the Trullan Canon meant to close.
Now, having thus set the frame, we may pass to our subject — Saint Andrew, his Life, its author, and its transmission down to us.

Saint Andrew: the life according to the written tradition

Saint Andrew, according to the Life written by the priest Nicephorus, was a Scythian by birth — according to this account, brought to Constantinople in the time of the emperor Leo, as the slave of a notable official named Theognostus.[14] The traditions of transmission are not uniform as to which emperor Leo is meant: some place him in the time of Leo VI the Wise (886-912), while the internal frame of the text, analysed by Rydén, points toward Leo I (457-474) — a question to which we return below. He was still young when he was bought, fair of face and wise of mind. His master, seeing his quickness, sent him to be instructed in letters, and Andrew quickly learned the Scriptures and the books of the Fathers. He read with love the lives of the martyrs and prayed at night, in secret.
One night, after the devil had tried to frighten him, Andrew had a vision. He found himself in a place of battle, with dark hosts on one side and luminous hosts on the other, and from among the luminous there appeared to him a most beautiful youth, who held three crowns. The youth urged him to fight with a dark giant who was challenging the enlightened. Andrew, strengthened by the youth, threw him down. Then the youth gave him the crowns and said to him: "*Go in peace, and from now on be our friend and brother. Run, therefore, toward the good struggle, be naked and a fool for My sake, and you shall be a partaker of many good things in the day of My Kingdom.*"[15]
This is the calling. From that hour, Andrew took upon himself folly for Christ.

The next day, rising, he prayed. Then he took a knife, went to the well of the house, and cut his garment to pieces, feigning madness. His master Theognostus, seeing him so, reckoned him possessed and sent him bound in chains to the church of the Holy Martyr Anastasia, after the manner of the time for those held by unclean spirits. There, Saint Anastasia herself appeared in a vision to a luminous elder — whom the Life shows to be Christ, though without naming Him explicitly — and bore witness concerning Andrew: "*He has healed him, who said to him, 'Be a fool for My sake, and you shall be a partaker of many good things in the day of My Kingdom'; and it is not possible for him to be healed.*"[16]
There too, in the church of Saint Anastasia, Andrew was attacked by the spirits of darkness, who came with axes and spears to kill him. Andrew cried out to Saint John the Apostle, and he came like lightning, accompanied by a luminous host, and commanded that the demons be scourged with Andrew's own

chain. Afterward the Apostle said to him, with a gentleness that will set the tone of his whole Life: "*You see that I hastened to your aid, for I care greatly for you, since God has commanded me to watch over you; therefore endure, and soon you shall be free.*"17
After four months of torments, seeing that Andrew was not healed, his master set him free. Then began his life in full view of the world: he ran through the streets like a madman, slept in refuse and among the dogs, ate half a rusk a day or nothing, was beaten, spat upon, and shoved; the alms he received he gave to the poor in secret — scattering the coins on the ground so that the needy might gather them without knowing the giving hand. He was seen in the marketplaces, in the taverns, in the most unclean places of the city. By day, he played the part of the madman. By night, in hidden corners or before the doors of the churches, he prayed in secret, at times raised from the ground into the air, according to the witness of those who chanced to see him.

Around him only two close spiritual bonds were kept: that with the priest Nicephorus and that with the young Epiphanius, a nobleman's son, future patriarch — according to the Saint's prophecy — and his disciple to the end. To Epiphanius, Andrew showed in visions things that he alone saw: his being caught up to the third heaven in a terrible winter, when he was nearly dead from cold; the visions concerning the souls of the departed (the soul of the licentious rich man carried off to hell by demons, the soul of the woman who had come to defend her body from the grave-robber); the dialogues on the Holy Trinity, on the end of the world, on the Antichrist; the vision at Blachernae, when he saw together with Epiphanius the Mother of God covering the faithful with her omophorion.

Two are those who, according to the Life, know his secret: the priest Nicephorus of Hagia Sophia, presented as his spiritual father and as the one who will write the Life, and Epiphanius, his disciple. With these two Andrew speaks openly, without feigning. With all the rest — he speaks as a madman, or does not speak at all.

He died at the age of sixty-six, on the twenty-eighth of May, after spending a last night in prayer beneath the colonnades of the hippodrome, in the place where the harlots passed the night. His body became invisible. Only a fragrance remained in that place, according to the witness of a poor woman nearby, who came with a light and found nothing but the fragrance. His commemoration, however, is kept on October 2nd, according to the liturgical calendar. Before his end, Andrew had confessed where he hoped his body would find its rest: "*The merciful God has forgiven my sins, and will lay my body together with that of the blessed Simeon, who lived a little while before me.*"18 Thus Saint Andrew places himself, by his own desire, in the line of the *saloi* before him — asking to be laid to rest beside Saint Simeon of Emesa, the first fool for Christ with a complete Life. The tradition of folly for Christ is not, therefore, a sum of scattered cases, but a living line, a spiritual filiation that the saints themselves recognize from within.
This is the Life, in very summary form. Beneath this narrative, however, lie questions that Tradition has never concealed, but which modern criticism has deepened in a way that compels us today to look at them squarely.

Who wrote the Life

The author presents himself at the end, in his own words: "*I, Nicephorus, by the mercy of God a*

*priest at the Great Church of Hagia Sophia, in the imperial city, have composed this long and wonder-filled writing concerning the manner of life of him among the Saints, Andrew. Besides the things I saw with my own eyes, the rest were made known to me by the ever-memorable Epiphanius, who afterward became Archbishop."*19

Thus the text places itself as the writing of a close spiritual father — the priest Nicephorus of Hagia Sophia — to whom alone, together with the disciple Epiphanius, Andrew is said to have spoken openly, without feigning. This is the traditional reading, transmitted without interruption in the Synaxarion and in the Athonite tradition down to today. In its popular Romanian form, transmitted by the Skete of Lacu on the Holy Mountain through Evanghelismos Press, Saint Andrew lived in the time of the emperor Leo the Wise (Leo VI, 886-912), and Nicephorus wrote of him from direct witness and through Epiphanius.20

Modern philological research, through the standard critical edition of Lennart Rydén, dates the text, in the form in which we have it, later — to the tenth century — and shows that the very chronological frame of the Life is carefully constructed by the author.21 This finding concerns the date and form of the text, not the veneration of Saint Andrew: the Church has never founded the commemoration of its saints on modern historical reconstruction, but on living Tradition, on liturgical commemoration, and on spiritual fruit. The reader interested in the philological arguments will find them treated in the endnotes.22

It is worth saying, however, a thing that belongs to the very nature of Orthodox hagiography. The patristic tradition never knew the simple identity between the *Life* of a saint and his *biography* in the modern sense. The hagiographer is not a chronicler; he is a servant of the icon. Just as an icon is not a photograph, yet transmits something truer than a photograph, so too a patristic Life uses the means of narrative — the ordering of events, the construction of dialogues, the selection of episodes — to transmit spiritual truths that mere chronicle could not reach. Lives such as those of Saint Mary of Egypt or Saint Onuphrius the Great were received by the Church, read liturgically, made nourishment for the faithful, precisely because, beyond the narrative layer, they transmit the truth of Tradition. Saint Andrew is real in the liturgical life of the Church, real in the Tradition that received him, real as a spiritual image of folly for Christ — and this is what matters for the one who reads his Life today for his profit.

The transmission of the text

The Life of Saint Andrew is one of the best-transmitted Byzantine hagiographical texts. Rydén's critical edition catalogues over a hundred Greek manuscripts that contain the text in whole or in part — of which 30 are from the Byzantine period (10th-15th c.) and 82 from the post-Byzantine period (16th-19th c.).23 This abundance testifies to a very wide reception and an uninterrupted circulation in the Greek-speaking Orthodox world.

Transmission into Slavonic began early, already in the eleventh and twelfth centuries, through the translation of the Life into Church Slavonic. In the Russian sphere, the cult of Saint Andrew was closely interwoven with the feast of the Protection (Pokrov), introduced liturgically by Saint Andrew Bogolyubsky in the twelfth century. Pokrov became one of the central feasts of the Russian Church and remains today a cornerstone of Slavic Marian piety.24

In the Greek tradition, the feast of the Protection did not have the same centrality that it acquired in the Slavic world. In 1952, the Church of Greece transferred the commemoration to October 28th, linking it to the memory of the protection of the Mother of God over the Greek people during the Second World War.

In the Romanian tradition, the reception of Saint Andrew and of the feast of the Protection was living but uneven: predominantly through the Slavic channel (before the modern era) and through Romanian Athonite monastic life (especially through the Prodromu Skete and the Lacu Skete, beginning in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). In the contemporary Romanian diaspora, especially in communities under jurisdictions of Russian roots, ROCOR or the OCA, the patronal feast of "the Protection of the Mother of God" is today among the most frequently encountered.

The Romanian translation authorized in the liturgical-monastic register — the one that the faithful and pilgrims read today in the Romanian Athonite cells and in the communities at home — is the translation of Hieroschemamonk Stephen Lacoschitiotul (elder of the cell "The Annunciation" at the Lacu Skete, Holy Mountain), published by Evanghelismos Press, Bucharest, 2002.25 It follows the Great Greek Synaxarion of the Paraclitos Monastery and preserves the traditional Romanian liturgical language. For the Romanian Orthodox reader, this version is *the living voice of Tradition* — distinct, without being in conflict, from the critical edition of Rydén, which serves another purpose (the precise philological reconstruction of the original Greek text).

Conclusion of Part I

Folly for Christ is one of the highest and harshest forms of Orthodox ascetic struggle because it produces humility directly: not through reflection, but through the reviling received daily and through the lack of any human comfort. Guarded by his very ascetic labour from the snare of vainglory, the *salos* becomes a pure vessel of grace — a path that the Church honoured, by its fruits, as one of the highest and most perilous forms of self-denial. Saint Andrew is its fulfilled image.
As for the text of the Life, philological research, through the work of Lennart Rydén, shows us that it must be read as a great Byzantine hagiographical composition of the tenth century, not as a modern biography. This does not touch the liturgical veneration of Saint Andrew; it asks of us only that we distinguish between the literary layer, the constructed chronological frame, and the spiritual teaching that the Church received.

The articles that follow will deepen the subject in two directions: the vision at Blachernae and the Protection of the Mother of God (Part II), and the discernment due to the prophecies in the apocalyptic section of the Life (Part III).

1. *The Egyptian Paterikon* (*Apophthegmata Patrum*, alphabetical collection), Antony 7. Primary source: Migne, P.G. 65, col. 77B. Standard English translation: Benedicta Ward, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers: The Alphabetical Collection*, Cistercian Studies Series 59, Kalamazoo, 1975/1984, p. 2 (Antony 7). ↩
2. *The Egyptian Paterikon*, Longinus (the answer to the question "which work is greater among all good works?"). Cf. the Romanian edition: *Patericul sau Apoftegmele Părinților din pustiu*, trans. Cristian Bădiliță, Polirom, 2003, ad loc. ↩
3. Saint John Climacus, *The Ladder*, Step 25 ("On the most exalted humble-mindedness, destroyer of the passions, which comes about through unseen inner perception"), scholion 15. In the Romanian edition: Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Filocalia*, vol. IX, IBMBOR Press, jubilee edition 2007, ad loc. The critical Greek text in P.G. 88. ↩

4. Saint John Climacus, *The Ladder*, Step 25, in Filocalia IX, ed. Stăniloae. The quotation is taken up by Father Cleopa Ilie in several homilies, as a concentrated formula of Climacus's teaching on humility. ↩

5. Saint Isaac the Syrian, *Ascetical Homilies*, in Filocalia X, trans. Fr. Prof. Dr. Dumitru Stăniloae, IBMBOR Press, Bucharest, 1981. For the recent critical Greek edition of Saint Isaac's text see *Ascetical Words*, bilingual edition, vols. I-II, translation and notes by Hieromonk Agapie Corbu, Saint Nectarius Press, Arad, 2022-2024 (*Philocalica Syriaca* collection, vol. 4). ↩

6. *The Egyptian Paterikon*, Macarius the Egyptian 23. The full passage contains Abba Macarius's counsel to go first to the graveyard to revile the dead, then the next day to praise them, so as to learn that "*one must take no account either of the injustice or of the glory of men."* ↩

7. *The Egyptian Paterikon*, Macarius the Egyptian 11. The passage describes Abba Macarius's encounter with the devil, who confesses that the one thing he cannot imitate, and by which he cannot prevail over him, is humility. ↩

8. *The Egyptian Paterikon*, Isidora (cf. also the *Lausiac History* of Palladius, ch. 34). For the critical philological treatment, see Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 49-66 ("Insane Saints"), which discusses the case of Isidora as the earliest documented *salos*. ↩

9. Saint Leontius of Neapolis (Cyprus), *The Life of Saint Simeon Salos*. Critical Greek edition: A.-J. Festugière and L. Rydén, *Léontios de Néapolis, Vie de Syméon le Fou et Vie de Jean de Chypre*, Paris, 1974. For the English translation with introductory study: Derek Krueger, *Symeon the Holy Fool: Leontius's Life and the Late Antique City*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1996. ↩

10. Saint Basil the Blessed (Vasily Blazhenny) is commemorated on August 2nd. Cf. Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, ch. 9 ("Old Russian Iurodstvo"), pp. 244-284. The Cathedral of Saint Basil the Blessed (Pokrovsky Sobor) on Red Square in Moscow was built between 1555-1561. ↩

11. Saint Xenia of Petersburg (Ksenia Peterburgskaya) is commemorated on January 24th / February 6th. Canonized by the Russian Orthodox Church in June 1988, on the occasion of the millennium of the Christianization of Rus'. Cf. Ivanov, *Holy Fools*, ch. 11 ("Iurodstvo in an Age of Transition"), pp. 311-344. ↩

12. Saint Gabriel Urgebadze (1929-1995) was canonized by the Georgian Orthodox Church in December 2012. Commemoration: November 2nd. For his life and accounts of contemporary witnesses see *Father Gabriel the Fool for Christ*, ed. Iv. Klimentin, Romanian translation, Bunavestire Press, 2015. ↩

13. Canon 60 of the Council in Trullo (Quinisext, Constantinople, 691). Text in J. B. Mansi (ed.), *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, vol. XI, Paris, 1901, col. 969; Romanian edition of the canons in *Canoanele Bisericii Ortodoxe*, notes and commentary by Archdeacon Prof. Dr. Ioan N. Floca, Sibiu, 1993. The canon targets the feigning of possession and of madness, prescribing for those who pretend the same canonical discipline prescribed for those truly held by unclean spirits. For the discussion of the relation between this canon and the *salos* phenomenon, see Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, Oxford University Press, 2006, pp. 131-132. ↩

14. The term "Scythian" in late Byzantine and Slavic sources can have an imprecise ethnic value; some traditions call him a Slav, others a Scythian. We do not insist here on a strict ethnic identification, but keep the language of the hagiographical tradition transmitted through the Lacu Skete / Evanghelismos. For a discussion of the ethnic question in the Life of St Andrew, see Lennart Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. 1, Uppsala, 1995,

pp. 41-43; cf. also *Lives of Saints*, Orthodox Church in America, the entry for St Andrew (October 2nd). ↩

15. *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ*, translation by Hieroschemamonk Stephen Lacoschitiotul (Lacu Skete, Holy Mountain), Evanghelismos Press, Bucharest, 2002. Text also available at marturieathonita.ro/sfantul-andrei-cel-nebun-pentru-hristos/. Correspondence with the critical edition: Lennart Rydén (ed.), *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. 2, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 4:2, Uppsala, 1995, lines 79-88; P.G. 111, col. 633 B-C. ↩

16. *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ*, Evanghelismos ed. 2002. Correspondence: Rydén, vol. 2, ll. 130-175; P.G. 111, col. 640. ↩

17. Idem. Correspondence: Rydén, vol. 2, ll. 176-217; P.G. 111, col. 641 C – 644 A. ↩

18. *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ*, Evanghelismos ed. 2002, the section "On the Repose of the Saint." The saint whom Andrew names is Saint Simeon of Emesa (6th c.), commemorated on July 21st, the first fool for Christ with a complete written Life. Correspondence with the critical edition: Rydén, vol. 2, ad loc. (the final section of the Life). ↩

19. *The Life of Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ*, Evanghelismos ed. 2002, the end of the text. Correspondence: Rydén, vol. 2, ll. 4392-4400; P.G. 111, col. 888 C-D. ↩

20. This traditional dating, placing Saint Andrew in the time of Leo VI the Wise (886-912), is the form under which the Great Greek Synaxarion of the Paraclitos Monastery and the Athonite tradition through the Lacu Skete transmit the Life. As noted in the text, this traditional chronological placement differs from the modern philological consensus; the two registers — that of liturgical reception and that of critical research — serve distinct purposes and must not be confused. ↩

21. Lennart Rydén (ed.), *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. 1: *Introduction, Testimonies and Nachleben. Indices*, Uppsala, 1995, pp. 41-71 ("The Date of Composition"). Rydén argues that the Life was composed "in the sixth decade of the tenth century," with a terminus post quem c. 950 (manuscript A of Munich) and a terminus ante quem November 959 (the death of the emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus). See also Rydén, "The Date of the *Life of St Andreas Salos*", *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 32 (1978), pp. 127-155. For the wider context of tenth-century Constantinopolitan hagiography as a self-reflexive literary text, see Paul Magdalino, "'What we Heard in the Lives of the Saints we have Seen with our Own Eyes': The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople", in *The Cult of Saints in Christianity and Islam: Essays on the Contribution of Peter Brown*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 83-112. ↩

22. Rydén's arguments for the tenth-century dating are convergent: **(1) vocabulary and style** — the language differs from seventh-century texts (the Life of St Simeon of Emesa, the *Pratum Spirituale*, the *Miracles of St Artemios*) and corresponds to the revised version of the Life of St Philaret, of the tenth century (Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 43-44; cf. "Style and Historical Fiction in the *Life of St Andreas Salos*", *Jahrbuch der Österreichischen Byzantinistik* 32/3, 1982, pp. 175-183); **(2) topography** — buildings mentioned in the text are not attested before the tenth century, among them the Myrelaion oratory, associated with the monastery raised by Romanos I Lekapenos c. 920 (Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 46-48; cf. Albrecht Berger, *Untersuchungen zu den Patria Konstantinupoleos*, Bonn, 1988); **(3) manuscript A of Munich** (codex Monacensis gr. 443), whose fragment in majuscule is dated palaeographically c. 950, possibly from the autograph original itself, written in an archaizing hand so as to appear old (Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 82-105); **(4) the apocalyptic material**, shared with the *Vision of Daniel in Hebrew* (945-959), with a "first apocalyptic emperor" who

seems to be Constantine VII, giving a terminus ante quem of November 959 (Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 50-53; cf. A. Sharf, *Byzantinische-neugriechische Jahrbücher* 20, 1970, pp. 302-318); **(5) the name Nicephorus**, frequent in Constantinople only from the second half of the eighth century (Rydén, vol. 1, p. 46; *Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, art. "Nikephoros"). — From all of these we retain strictly the philological element: the dating of the text and the constructed character of the chronological frame. The wider interpretative conclusion that Rydén adds, concerning the historical existence of the person (vol. 1, p. 143), belongs to the presuppositions of the historical-critical method and exceeds what the philological evidence can establish; we do not adopt it here. — Sergey A. Ivanov suggests that placing the action before the Council in Trullo (691), whose Canon 60 forbade the feigning of possession (see note 13), shields the subject from the canonical prohibition, since a saint presented as being from the fifth century was not obliged to know a decision from the seventh (*Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond*, Oxford, 2006, p. 157). For the wider context of tenth-century Constantinopolitan hagiography as a literary text, see Paul Magdalino, "'What we Heard in the Lives of the Saints we have Seen with our Own Eyes': The Holy Man as Literary Text in Tenth-Century Constantinople", in *The Cult of Saints in Christianity and Islam*, ed. J. Howard-Johnston and P. A. Hayward, Oxford, 1999, pp. 83-112. ↩

23. Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 151-181 ("Manuscripts"). The catalogue comprises 112 Greek manuscripts with the Life of Saint Andrew (in whole or in part), of which 30 date from the Byzantine period (10th-15th c.) and 82 from the post-Byzantine period (16th-19th c.). The figures are summarized in Sergey A. Ivanov, *Holy Fools in Byzantium and Beyond* (Oxford, 2006), p. 156. ↩

24. Cf. Rydén, vol. 1, pp. 199-203 ("Two Monasteries associated with Andrew in Russian Sources"). On the history of the Pokrov feast in the Slavic sphere see also Vera Shevzov, *Russian Orthodoxy on the Eve of Revolution*, Oxford University Press, 2004,

Part II of a three-part series on Saint Andrew Salos of Constantinople

On 1 October the Church celebrates the Protection of the Mother of God, that is, the shelter the Most Holy Theotokos gives the faithful through her prayer. The Churches that keep the Julian calendar celebrate the feast on the same day of the month, which falls on 14 October in the civil calendar. The Church of Greece celebrates it on 28 October.

The feast begins with a vision in Constantinople. One night, in the church in the quarter of Blachernae, the Mother of God appeared praying for the people and covering them with her veil. She was seen by Saint Andrew the Fool for Christ, a saint who hid his life with God beneath the appearance of a man without reason. His disciple Epiphanius saw her with him. In many Orthodox Churches Saint Andrew is commemorated on the day after the feast, 2 October, while the Churches of Greek tradition commemorate him on 28 May.1
In the first part of this series we told the life of Saint Andrew as the priest Nicephorus wrote it. Here we stop at the vision of Blachernae.

The name of the feast carries two meanings at once. It means the veil that covers, and it means the protection the strong give to the weak. The Greek name of the feast, Skepi, and the Slavonic, Pokrov, both carry these two meanings.

The troparion, the hymn that sums up the meaning of the feast and is sung several times on its day, says:

> Today we, the faithful people, keep the feast in brightness, overshadowed by your

> coming, O Mother of God, and, looking with compunction upon your most honoured icon, we say: Cover us with your honoured protection, and deliver us from all evil, entreating your Son, Christ our God, to save our souls.10

The verb “overshadow” is also found at the Annunciation, when the angel said to the Virgin: “the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” (Luke 1:35).2 There the word shows the work of God, by which the Son became incarnate of her. In the troparion the same word shows the protection we receive through her prayers, as from a shade that shelters.

The church of Blachernae

Blachernae was a quarter by the walls of Constantinople. There, beside a spring held to be holy, the holy Empress Pulcheria began in the year 450 to build a church dedicated to the Mother of God. After her death her husband, the Emperor Marcian, completed the work.3
The Emperor Leo I then built beside it a chapel, a small round church joined to the large one. The chapel was called the Holy Reliquary (in Greek, Hagia Soros), because the garment of the Mother of God, brought from Palestine in the year 473, was laid in it. From then on, in time of danger, the city ran to Blachernae.

In the year 626 the Avars and the Persians besieged Constantinople. The icon of the Mother of God of Blachernae was carried along the walls, and soon afterwards the Avar army was destroyed. The church, which then stood outside the walls, was the only one the invaders did not plunder. Later the Emperor Heraclius built a new wall that took the quarter inside the city.

In the church of Blachernae all-night vigils were held, that is, services lasting from evening until nearly daybreak. It burned in 1434, nineteen years before the fall of Constantinople. On its site, beside the spring that still flows today, a small church was built in 1867. For almost six centuries nothing of the church of Blachernae has stood, yet the vision seen there is celebrated today throughout the Orthodox world.

The vision according to the Life of Saint Andrew

The Life of Saint Andrew tells of the vision at length.4 One night a vigil was being kept in the Holy Reliquary, the chapel where the garment of the Mother of God was kept. Andrew had come too, and was behaving, as usual, like a man without reason. Epiphanius was also there, with one of his servants. Andrew used to stand at the service as long as his zeal held him, sometimes until midnight, sometimes until morning.
At about the fourth hour of the night, that is, some four hours after sunset, Andrew saw the Most Holy Theotokos entering the church. She was very tall, and an awesome company accompanied her. On either side Saint John the Forerunner and Saint John the Evangelist held her by the hand. Many saints in white garments went with her, some before her and some behind her, and they sang hymns and spiritual songs.

The Mother of God drew near the ambo, the raised place in the middle of the church from which the readings were read and the hymns sung. Then Andrew went to Epiphanius and asked him: “Do you see the Lady and Mistress of the world?” The disciple answered: “Yes, my spiritual father.”5
Before their eyes the Mother of God knelt and prayed for a long time, her most pure face wet with tears. Then she went into the sanctuary and prayed there for the people standing round. When she had prayed, she took the veil from her head, and it shone like lightning. She held it

in her most pure hands, great and awesome as it was, and spread it over all the people. For a long time the two saw it spread over the people, shining with the glory of the Lord. As long as the Mother of God remained there, the veil could be seen. After she left, they saw it no more. The veil she took with her, but her grace she left to those who were present.

At the end the Life says that Epiphanius saw all this through Andrew's mediation. The saint had boldness before God and gave his disciple to see what he himself saw. Boldness here means the freedom with which a saint stands before God and speaks to Him.

The vision according to the synaxarion of the feast

The Menaion, the book containing the services for each day of the month, also has on 1 October a synaxarion of the feast. A synaxarion is the reading about the saint or feast of the day, appointed at Matins, the morning service. That of the Protection tells of the vision more briefly.

It was the night before a Sunday, 1 October, and the church of Blachernae was full of people who had come to the vigil. At about the fourth hour of the night Saint Andrew lifted up his eyes, together with his disciple, the blessed Epiphanius. Both saw the Queen of Heaven, the Protectress of the whole world, the Most Holy Virgin Theotokos, standing in the air and praying. She shone with light and covered the people with her honoured omophorion. Omophorion here means the veil over her head and shoulders. Around her stood the heavenly hosts and a multitude of saints clothed in white. Two of them were more prominent: Saint John the Forerunner and Saint John the Evangelist.

The Life shows the Mother of God walking through the church, kneeling and entering the sanctuary. The synaxarion shows her standing in the air. So the service of the feast sings of her, and so the icon paints her.

The synaxarion places the vision in the days of the Emperor Leo the Wise, who reigned from 886 to 912. The Life begins its account in the reign of another emperor of the same name, Leo the Great.6 This is Leo I, the builder of the chapel of the Holy Reliquary, who reigned from 457 to 474. We showed in the first part that the Life was written around the middle of the tenth century and that the years in which it sets its account were arranged by its author. What the Church received into the service of the feast is the vision itself: the Mother of God praying for the world and covering the people.
The synaxarion also keeps something the Life does not have: the words of the prayer the Mother of God offered to her Son.

> Heavenly King! Receive every man who glorifies You and calls upon Your most holy name in every place; and wherever my name is remembered, sanctify that place, and glorify those who glorify You, and those who with love honour me, Your Mother. Receive all their prayers and vows, and deliver them from all needs and evils.

The vows are the promises a person makes before God. In the whole of this prayer the Mother of God asks nothing for herself.

A fool for Christ

In another vision, the Life shows Andrew honouring the Mother of God. On Palm Sunday,

when the city was praising Christ with palm branches and hymns, Andrew saw the prophet David in the church of Holy Wisdom. He came with a countless multitude and played upon a lyre. Andrew leapt for joy and cried out with the words of Psalm 131, speaking of the Lady who intercedes with the Lord. Some of those present thought his words foolish and laughed at him.[7]

The Life then explains what the saint meant. In this psalm David vows: “I will not give sleep to mine eyes […] until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the God of Jacob” (Psalm 131:4-5). Andrew was telling the prophet that the dwelling he sought had now been found: first the great Lady who intercedes for us, and then the Church.

At Matins of the feast the Gospel is read in which Mary, come to the house of Elizabeth, magnifies God: “For he hath regarded the low estate of his handmaiden: for, behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed” (Luke 1:48). She whose lowliness God regarded let herself be seen, at Blachernae, by a man the whole city despised.

Invisibly, in the church

The vision of Blachernae revealed in visible form the care and prayer of the Mother of God for mankind. The kontakion of the feast, the other short hymn of the day, which is also sung at the Liturgy, speaks of the same prayer as something taking place today:

> Today the Virgin stands before God in the church, and with the choirs of the saints invisibly prays to God for us. Angels with hierarchs worship, and apostles with prophets dance for joy; for the Theotokos entreats the pre-eternal God for us.

She “stands before” God as one who prays for others. The apostles and prophets “dance for joy”, as King David once danced before the ark of the covenant, the holy chest in which the tablets of the Law were kept. The canon of Matins, the series of hymns of that service, makes this very comparison: the faithful now run into the church before the Mother of God with a joy greater than David’s. “The pre-eternal God” is the eternal God.

The kontakion says that she stands in the church even today and prays “invisibly”. A hymn from Vespers, the evening service of the feast, calls the faithful to that very place:

> Come, ye faithful, into the holy church, for there the Theotokos covers the people with her omophorion from all the temptations of the enemy.

In the canon of Matins the Church asks her to come now, as she came then:

> Come now with great glory into your church, O Theotokos, with the assemblies of all the saints, as Saint Andrew once saw you in the air praying for Christians, and grant us your mercy.

The prayer of a Mother

The service of the feast says that Christ Himself gave her to mankind as “defender and mighty protection”. The Gospel shows the hour in which the Lord, from the Cross, gave her the beloved disciple as a son:

> When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son! Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. (John 19:26-27)

The Mother of God stood by the Cross and saw with her own eyes the death of her Son. Among the hymns of the Menaion of 1 October there is one that shows her in that hour:

> When the Most Pure saw You hanging on the Cross, weeping she cried out as a Mother: My Son and my God! My most sweet Son! How do You suffer a shameful passion?

The tears of the vision of Blachernae remind us that she who prays for the world is the Mother who stood beside the Cross of her Son.

Her protection does not spare the believer the cross. It gives him the assurance that he does not carry it alone, until the hour when the soul is parted from the body.

All her protection passes through her prayer to the Son. The troparion asks her to cover us "entreating your Son". The kontakion sings that she prays for us to the eternal God. A hymn of the vigil shows her "ever stretching out her hands to her Son for us". The Menaion says that she has towards Him "a mother's boldness", that is, the confidence with which a mother speaks to her son.

The Mother of God does not entreat her Son as though she were merciful and He without mercy. She prays to Him who loved us and gave Himself for us. Her love as a Mother is in full union with His love for mankind.

Saint Gregory Palamas, in his homily on the Dormition of the Mother of God, writes that she was raised above the angels and archangels by her nearness to God. He also says that she alone is the boundary between created and uncreated nature.8 This word shows her unique place in the mystery of the Incarnation: from her the Son of God took human nature without ceasing to be God. The Mother of God remains a creature, sanctified and glorified by grace, and the union of the divine nature with the human took place in the Person of her Son. She received the Son with faith and obedience, saying: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word" (Luke 1:38). Therefore, among creatures, no one stands nearer to Him than His Mother.

Her protection is a gift of love, and love is not bought with the number of prayers. The service shows clearly for whom she prays: for those who glorify her Son and for sinners who run to her. She leads them all by her prayer to Christ.

How the feast spread

The vision took place in Constantinople, but the feast was first established in old Rus'. The tradition of the Russian Church regards as its founder the right-believing Prince Andrei Bogolyubsky, who ruled the land of Vladimir in the twelfth century. In his time the church of the Protection on the Nerl, near Vladimir, was built, and it still stands today.

The Romanian Menaion, in its 1929 edition, has a plain note on this day:

> On this day the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary is celebrated in the land of Russia with a vigil. From there we too have taken the custom in our monasteries of celebrating this feast with a vigil.

The service was put into the book for those who have greater devotion to the Mother of God.

The transfer of the feast to 28 October in the Church of Greece was decided in 1952. On that day in 1940 the war had begun for Greece, and the transfer was made in thanksgiving for the protection of the Mother of God in those years.9

The icon of the feast

The icon of the Protection, in the form that became usual, developed in the Russian tradition from the vision in Constantinople. Above, in the centre, the Mother of God stands in the air, surrounded by light. Sometimes she holds the veil spread in her hands. Sometimes she prays with raised arms, and two angels hold the veil above her. On either side stand Saint John the Forerunner and Saint John the Evangelist, the apostles, the hierarchs and other saints. Below, Saint Andrew points to the Mother of God and turns towards Epiphanius, as in the Life, where it is he who shows her to his disciple.

Often, directly beneath the Mother of God, a deacon stands on the ambo singing from a scroll. The deacon is Saint Romanos the Melodist, that is, the composer of hymns, whom the Church also commemorates on 1 October. He was not present at the vision, but the icon gathers together the saints connected with the feast.

His synaxarion tells that he came from Syria to Constantinople in the days of the Emperor Anastasius and served at the church of the Mother of God in the quarter of Kyrou. In the evening he would go to the vigil at Blachernae, and after the service return to his church. The Mother of God appeared to him in a dream and gave him a piece of paper, commanding him to eat it. It was the feast of the Nativity of the Lord. As soon as he woke, Romanos went up into the ambo and began to sing: “Today the Virgin gives birth to Him who is above all being…” According to the same synaxarion, he afterwards composed more than a thousand kontakia.

The kontakion of the Protection begins with the same words, “Today the Virgin”, and is sung to the model melody of the kontakion of the Nativity, the hymn that gives it its metre and tune. In the icon of the feast the singer who received the gift of song from the Mother of God stands at her feet.

On the same day the synaxarion also commemorates two singers of the Great Lavra on Mount Athos, the Venerable John Koukouzelis and the Venerable Gregory the Domestikos. Of the second it is said that he received a gold coin as a gift from the Theotokos.

Beneath her protection

Nothing in the service of the feast urges the faithful to go in search of visions. The service calls them into the church, where the people of God pray. Yet the prayer of the Mother of God does not stop at the walls of the church. In the synaxarion she asks her Son to receive every man who calls upon His name “in every place”.

At Matins, after Psalm 50, “Have mercy on me, O God”, it is sung: “Through the prayers of the Theotokos, O Merciful One, cleanse the multitude of our transgressions.” This petition comes straight after the psalm of repentance. The one who repents does not pray alone: the Mother of God prays with him.

One enters beneath her protection with a humble heart, with repentance and prayer, in the Church of her Son. Towards the end of Matins the Church prays thus:

> O most holy Lady Virgin Theotokos, cover us with your wondrous omophorion […]; you whom the wondrous Andrew saw praying in the church of Blachernae, send us now also, O Lady, your great mercy.

In Part III we shall read Saint Andrew's words to Epiphanius about the end of the world, and see with what discernment such prophecies ought to be received.

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1. For the commemoration on 28 May: *Ορθόδοξος Συναξαριστής* (the Greek Orthodox Synaxarion), 28 May, "Άγιος Ανδρέας ο διά Χριστόν σαλός". ↩
2. Scripture is quoted from the King James Version. Psalm 131 follows the numbering of the Septuagint (Psalm 132 in the KJV); the phrase "the God of Jacob" follows the Septuagint, where the KJV has "the mighty God of Jacob". ↩
3. Raymond Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'Empire byzantin*, I/3: *Les églises et les monastères*, Paris, 1953, pp. 169–176. ↩
4. Lennart Rydén, *The Life of St Andrew the Fool*, vol. II (Greek text with English translation), Studia Byzantina Upsaliensia 4, Uppsala, 1995, p. 255; in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 111, col. 848C–849A. The account of the vision is retold here after Rydén's edition. The Life also exists in a Romanian translation by Constantin Fădur, made from the English version of the Great Synaxaristes (Stella Orientalis), in the chapter on the vision of the Theotokos at Blachernae. There the vision has some different details: the Mother of God takes the Protection out of the reliquary of the chapel, and after she rises to heaven the garment remains in the reliquary. ↩
5. In Constantin Fădur's Romanian translation, Epiphanius answers that he sees her through Andrew's prayers. The Russian *Lives of the Saints*, compiled after the Reading Menaia of Saint Dimitri of Rostov, 1 October, "Homily on the Protection of the Most Holy Theotokos", give the dialogue more briefly and in other words: Andrew asks whether his brother sees the Queen and Lady of all praying for the whole world, and Epiphanius answers that he sees her and trembles. The tears, the prayer in the sanctuary and the veil spread over the people appear in that Russian edition in a note (note 6). ↩
6. Rydén, vol. II, p. 13, lines 10–11. Note 3 of Constantin Fădur's translation records that some scholars have thought of Leo I and others of Leo VI. It judges Leo I the most likely, among other reasons because the Life mentions Saint Andrew's meeting with Saint Daniel the Stylite, who reposed in 493. ↩
7. Rydén, vol. II, p. 185, chapter 36, "On the vision of the Prophet David"; in *Patrologia Graeca*, vol. 111, col. 788D–789B. In Constantin Fădur's translation, the chapter on the vision of the Prophet and King David. ↩
8. Saint Gregory Palamas, *Homily 37, On the Dormition of the Mother of God*. ↩
9. Decision of the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece of 21 October 1952. ↩
10. *Menaion for October*, first day, service of the Protection, in the Romanian edition of 1929 (text at slujbe.teologie.net). The kontakion, stichera, canon troparia, synaxaria and exapostilarion quoted in the article come from the same day of the Menaion. The liturgical texts are given in our translation from the Romanian. ↩