

Compassion and Salvation



This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On February 13th the Church honors Saint Martinian, a fourth-century native of Caesarea in Palestine.

His life is closely intertwined with the lives of two women, Zoe and Photina, who are commemorated on the same day. Yet he was a hermit saint, and already by the age of eighteen he had decided to live his life in a mountain retreat fairly near the city but having no contact with it. He would be there for twenty-five years, becoming known in the area for his gift of healing and his silence.

A woman of Caesarea, named Zoe, had heard a great deal about the holiness of this man who never came to the city but who seemed to be known to everyone in it. Perhaps it was because she wanted to test the power of her feminine wiles that she decided she would make him betray his vow of celibacy.

Zoe put on rags and made herself look disheveled. Then she approached his dwelling at night, pretending she was disoriented after wandering too far in the dark. Appealing to his compassion, she prevailed on him to let her spend the night in his cell. He went to sleep in a large crevice near the cell.

Just before morning, Zoe tidied herself and changed into alluring clothes she'd brought in what had seemed like a beggar's bundle. When Martinian came to tell her she must leave, she offered herself to him in a low, sultry voice. He was almost overcome with desire, and walked outside for a moment to recover.

Perhaps it was because he'd been compassionate that God strengthened Martinian, keeping him from doing something that would have destroyed the life he'd worked for a quarter-century to build. He returned to the cell, built a small fire, and put his feet into it. The pain made this man, known for silence, cry out. He pulled his feet from the fire and lay gasping and sobbing on the ground.

Then he said to Zoe: "If I cannot bear this little fire, how shall I cope with the fires of hell?" She was so overcome that she begged him to help her change her life. He sent her to the monastery in Bethlehem overseen by Saint Paula, and there she lived in prayer and repentance for the rest of her life.

Once his legs healed, Martinian moved to a remote island, where a kind boatman brought him provisions every few months. But a few years later his compassion was called on again when he heard a young woman crying for help. She had survived a shipwreck and was floating toward his island on a plank.

He went and pulled young Photina to safety. To avoid temptation, he invited her to stay on the island and live on his provisions till the boatman came again. Saying farewell, he dove into the water and swam to the mainland.

Martinian lived out his life peacefully in Athens. He is called a hermit saint, but perhaps his salvation also depended on his compassionate unwillingness to leave a woman in distress.

Troparion - Tone 8

You quenched the flames of passion,
blessed Martinian, with abundant tears;
you calmed the waves of the sea
and checked the assaults of wild beasts, saying:
"Almighty God, You are most glorious,
for You have saved me from the fire and storm!"