

Blessed Andrew

The Fool-for-Christ at Constantinople

Commemorated on the day after the Pokrov, 2 October

He was born a Scythian and came to live in Constantinople as the slave of Theognostus, a *protospatharios* ("first sword-bearer," an honorific title) to Emperor Leo VI the Great (886-912). He was also the spiritual child of Nicephorus, a priest at Hagia Sophia during that time.

Blessed Andrew loved God's Church and the Holy Scriptures, and he had a strong desire to devote himself totally to God. He took upon himself a very difficult and unusual ascetic feat of fool-for-Christ; that is, he acted as if he were insane.

Seeming to be insane, Andrew was brought to the Church of St. Anastasia for his care. There St. Anastasia appeared to him in a dream and encouraged him to continue his ascetic feat. He was driven off the church property because of his faked madness and had to live on the streets of the capital city, hungry and half-naked. For many years the saint endured mockery, insults, and beatings. He begged for alms and gave them away to the poor. The beggars to whom he gave his last coins despised him, but Andrew endured all his sufferings humbly and prayed for those who hurt him.

St. Andrew's holy wisdom and extraordinary spiritual beauty were revealed when he removed his mask of folly. This occurred when talking to his spiritual father, a presbyter of Hagia Sophia, or to his disciple Epiphanius.

For his meekness and self-control, the saint received from the Lord the gifts of prophecy and wisdom, saving many from spiritual perils. Like the apostle Paul, he was taken to the third heaven and had the honor of seeing Lord Jesus Christ himself, angels and many holy saints, yet he was surprised not to see the Most Holy Virgin.

While praying at the Blachernae church, it was St. Andrew who, with his disciple, the Blessed Epiphanius, saw the Most Holy Mother of God, holding her veil over those praying under her Protection. The synaxarion states that upon seeing this vision, St. Andrew turned to his companion and asked, "Do you see, brother, the Holy Theotokos, praying for all the world?" Epiphanius answered, "I do see, holy Father, and I am in awe."

Blessed Andrew died in the year 936 at the age of 66.

God chooses "the foolish things of the world to shame the wise;
the weak things of the world to shame the strong"
(1 Corinthians 1:27).

Fools-for-Christ, by taking on the appearance of madness and suffering defamation from those around them, exposed human vices, brought those in power to their senses, comforted the suffering. Some of these are St. Andrew the Fool for Christ, St. Xenia of St. Petersburg, St. Basil of Moscow, Nicholas of Pskov and John of Rostov ("the Hairy").

In Greek, the term for Holy Fool is σαλός. In Russian, юродивый is a Holy Fool, one who acts intentionally foolish in the eyes of men. He or she often goes around half-naked, is homeless, speaks in riddles, is believed to be clairvoyant and a prophet, and may occasionally be disruptive and challenging to the point of seeming immoral (though always to make a point). source: OrthodoxWiki

One form of the ascetic Christian life is called foolishness for the sake of Christ. The fool-for-Christ set for himself the task of battling within himself the root of all sin, pride. In order to accomplish this he took on an unusual style of life, appearing as someone bereft of his mental faculties, thus bringing upon himself the ridicule of others. In addition he exposed the evil in the world through metaphorical and symbolic words and actions. He took this ascetic endeavor upon himself in order to humble himself and to also more effectively influence others, since most people respond to the usual ordinary sermon with indifference. The spiritual feat of foolishness for Christ was especially widespread in Russia.

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