

The Martyrs Adrian and Natalia

Not a perfect life! Pray for Everyone!

Commemorated Aug 26/ Sep 8

Summary: The martyrdom of Adrian and Natalia demonstrates that the matter what we do in life, when God calls us, if our heart is open to him, we will be saved. They didn't do everything right. Natalia was a secret Christian, and Adrian was a pagan. But God did not abandon them, and Natalia became a confessor and martyr and assisted her husband Adrian in a feat of incredible martyrdom.

This text was transcribed and edited for clarification and accuracy, from the audio homily

Text: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/saints-08-26_2019+martyrs-adrian-and-natalia.pdf

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Audio: http://www.orthodox.net/sermons/saints-08-26_2019+martyrs-adrian-and-natalia.mp3

In the Name of the Father and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, amen. Today we have the feast of Adrian and the Natalia. Both are martyrs, although only one was actually killed. Adrian was killed, and Natalia witnessed the martyrdom, and assisted him during his martyrdom, and died not very long thereafter. They were from Nicomedia and they were martyred during the reign of Maximian, I believe around, 305 to 311.

When we read the lives of the saints, we have to glean something from them. I like when lives are not “perfect”, because we are not perfect. The life of Adrian and Natalia was not perfect. Natalia was a secret Christian. She had been raised as a Christian, but she was married to Adrian, and at the time of his martyrdom he was 28, and they had been married for a year. He was definitely a pagan because he was an official in the praetorium. He would be helping with the record taking and the handling of prisoners. He was a person of some influence and some authority. Absolutely, positively, he must have been sacrificing to the emperor every year. He was a pagan. Now perhaps in his private life he was not, and perhaps he and Natalia had something private, but officially he was a pagan and she was a Christian.

Let's not gloss over this. Let's not say well, you know, they were all holy. One could argue that Natalia didn't do the right thing. Now the results turned out pretty well and that's the important thing in their life, because if a person has a good heart, then God reaches them. Now perhaps Natalia was in an arranged marriage or she had had been forced into it; we don't know the exact details, but she must have prayed for her husband.

Adrian had a good heart, and he had a change of heart when he found out these about 23 Christians who had been found in a cave. They were put in prison and were tortured various ways, and then they were going to be executed. Adrian went to talk to them, and asked them why would they endure such tortures? Many were in the bloom of their youth, and even if they were released, they would be permanently disfigured. Why would they do such a thing? And they told him about the love of Christ, and his heart was opened to Christ.

This must have had something to do with Natalia. He told the recorders: “enter me on the list because I wish to die for Christ.” And so, he was put in prison. He went from being an official with some authority, to being put in a common prison with the rest of the Christians who are considered to be lower than low.

Natalia found out about this and thought that he had been put in prison because he did something wrong, some sort of illegal things, but then she found out that it was because he had professed to be a Christian. He was a professed Christian without baptism, but the Holy Spirit was filling him with zeal and with courage. She dressed in all her finery' so they must have had some money, and she went to the prison to visit him and rejoiced and encouraged him. She would visit the prison regularly to minister to him and the other prisoners.

Our prisons are different than the ancient prisons and even some in the world today. In our prisons there are not people coming to prisons to give people food and clothing and such like that. In some parts of the world if you don't have

friends and family bringing you food and clothing you are going to starve and be naked. This is the way it was in ancient times that, people would come very regularly to the prison to take care of their loved ones.

Adrian learned the day of his martyrdom. He bribed the guards so that he could leave and go tell her. When he knocked on the door she thought: what is he doing here - he must have apostasized - and she rebuked him. This is the wife of a person of some renown, of some money. And she was upset because she thought he was renouncing his martyrdom. How many people might say:” let’s go quickly, and get on a ship and go to Egypt right away, where nobody knows us. We will be safe; We have some money, and we can bring one or 2 of our slaves and everything will be fine”. But instead she rebuked him. She found out that indeed he wasn't coming to run away; he was coming to tell her of the date of his martyrdom.

While awaiting her husband’s martyrdom, Natalia kept coming to the prison to take care of people and the Emperor found out about this and forbade it. What did she do? She cut off her hair, and dressed in men's clothes and went to the prison and continued to take care of the martyrs anyway.

So, the day of the martyrdom arrived. The tortures were terrible, and Natalia feared that her husband might lose heart so she asked permission to be with him during his martyrdom. Adrian appeared before the emperor and confessed Christ boldly. And he was beaten with staves so much that his entrails fell out. And then later on the torturers would break off his hands and feet, and maybe other parts of his body by putting them on an anvil and hitting them with a hammer – something that would be incredibly painful.

Natalia was with him, holding him, comforting him, encouraging him during the very time of his martyrdom. This is real true marriage. She was helping him to be in the kingdom forever, and not hold on to temporary life. We do not praise her for whatever she did in the beginning when she married him - maybe she maybe she was afraid, maybe she made a concession, who knows? But because of her prayer and because of her zeal she encouraged her husband in his death and the death of the other 23 martyrs.

She stole one of his hands that had been cut off and kept it as a relic. After her husband’s martyrdom, a wealthy pagan desired to marry her. So, she ran away so she wouldn't be violated. She died shortly thereafter, of natural causes.

The reason why she had kept her Christianity secret was because she didn't want to be violated by the pagans. Indeed, that's a problem even in our day. We should be aware that in places like Egypt, there are fathers who weep because they have beautiful daughters, because they're afraid that their daughters will be raped. Many times, this does occur and of course there is no justice for this in the world. The people who rape them, being Moslems, are not judged for this and in fact sometimes a woman who is raped is then judged for being an adulterer. To this day this is happening. There are people who are afraid, and they go to bed afraid that their daughters are going to be violated or stolen away, or tortured. Some are afraid that people will come with hunting knives and cut off the heads of their family; this has happened in Syria, in our day. Of course, that's not important news - important news to our media is whatever LGBTQ thing is happening in Iowa or somewhere else. The world is not interested in whether or not people are being martyred, but it's happening in our day and we must be aware of it. The story of Adrian and Natalia is not an isolated story that is in the dustbin of history. There are still martyrs, even now. And we must beware of this and ask their intercession, and we also must learn something from their lives.

I learned four things from the life and martyrdom of Adrian and Natalia. One of them is: *let's not judge*. We can say: “it’s not a good idea for you to do this, you should not marry this person because they’re not a Christian” or something like that. But once they’ve married that person what are you going to do? Are you going to put a red checkmark by thy name or something? We still pray for them and help them and should be free of judgment.

Another important lesson from their life: *God can bring anyone to repentance*. He brought Adrian to repentance through the prayers of Natalia. What are we doing? Are we praying for those people that we think are far gone? I know a zillion of them. There are an incredible number of people that are not doing well. Do you pray for those people? Do you pray for

people in your life that have come in and out of it, and are in a bad way? You must do this! This is what the life of St. Adrian and Natalia teaches us. We should not believe anyone is lost. We should commend them to the mercy of God.

And we should also be amazed at the courage of both Adrian and Natalia. Because it's one thing to be courageous and say: "I'm a Christian, and I will confess Christ", and it's another thing when a person holds a hammer, and has one of your joints on the anvil. A place that had that kind of courage because God helped them. We must pray for that courage, we must to pray for the love that would be such that we would pray for others and care about others, and not be full of judgment of them. I don't mean we should pretend that they're doing fine. We're not going to be like the crowd, which says "love is love" and say whatever people do is okay! No, whatever people do is not always okay, but we should pray for people without judgement of them.

And there's another great thing about their life, just like Saint Sophia. Sophia wasn't killed because of Christ. She watched her 3 children (Faith, Hope and Love) being killed right before her eyes and encouraged them. A week later, on the grave, probably not having eaten the entire time, she died, and we consider her to be a martyr as much as we do Saint Natalia, who was not killed for confessing Christ. She watched her husband brutally murdered, tortured for confessing Christ and we count her among the martyrs.

And also, one other thing: Adrian was not baptized - until his blood flowed. We call that the "*baptism of blood*". So indeed, God received him into his kingdom because of his confession and his courage and his love, with the help of his wife. And he was baptized in his blood.

Through their holy prayers may God help us. "The blessing of the Lord be upon you through His grace and love for mankind, always now and ever, and unto the ages of ages". Amen.