

The Prologue - November 10/23, 2018

THE HOLY GREAT-MARTYR MENAS, THE HOLY MARTYR STEFAN OF DEČANI, KING OF SERBIA

Link: <http://westserbdio.org/en/prologue/690-november-11?tmpl=component&print=1&page=>

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Read the prologue every day.



Partial Summary for November 11

Bishop Nikolai's prologue for today is particularly rich. It speaks of two great saints, the holy great martyr MENAS and the holy King STEFAN OF DEČANI. Together, they teach us patience, encourage, and restraint. My guys in prison often suffer acutely from a feeling that their life is being wasted because of their incarceration. Some of them struggle with feelings of despondency and hopelessness. They see only bad things happening to them and to those they love and struggle to make sense out of it all. I'm going to send them the life of STEFAN OF DEČANI.

Bishop Nikolai is always very poetic, as a Serb, his love for Serbian saints particularly shines. Stephan was blinded as a young boy by his father. He would certainly have much reason to bemoan his fate and to become embittered, but this man was too great of soul for that. He was so pure and holy that St. Nicholas appeared to him showing him his eyes in his palm and told him that he would eventually give him his eyes back.

Imagine, if we could have such faith that we would believe that no matter what we are suffering in this life, God is with us and we will eventually be vindicated! Many of us have lost our spiritual eyes, and we cannot see God working in our life. Stephan lost his physical eyes but not his spiritual eyes. Why?

Because the man was patient and a struggler and he prayed. At another point in his life he was banished to a monastery so that the fasting and the rigor would weaken him. He actually became much stronger because of his struggles in the monastery. After five years of incarceration in the monastery – and let's not pretend here – he was a prisoner and thereby treated like a prisoner – Bishop Nikolai tells us: "When five years had passed, St. Nicholas again appeared to him and said: 'I came to fulfill my promise.' He then traced the sign of the Cross on the blind king, and Stefan received his sight. In thanksgiving to God, Stefan built the Church of Dečani, one of the most marvelous works of Byzantine artistic beauty, and one of the most famous monuments of Serbian piety."

King Stefan's life is marvelous. Which one of us would be as patient? Which one of us would be as wise and holy? Which one of us would struggle when there was no indication that our struggles would bear any fruit?

The ascetical martyrdom of the holy great martyr Menas is equally compelling. He was a soldier in the Egyptian army, but did not want to take part in the idolatrous sacrifices. He withdrew to the wilderness and lived like an angel with the beasts in the forest. He did not go away because he was a coward. Later in his life by revelation he knew about a pagan festival that was near him and with holy zeal decided to go down and confess Christ. This would not only be a death sentence for him but also a sentence to a cruel death. What possesses men to have such great love for Christ that they ignore peril and danger? It is the love of Christ in the heart, which blossoms, like the mustard seed into a great tree, so that the birds of the heavens can nest in it. St. Menas was no doubt motivated by a great desire to witness of Christ and by his feat of ascetical courage, cause some who are wavering to also confess Christ. His act was an evangelical endeavor.

St. Nikolai's soul was so aflame with love for his holy King that he wrote a poem about him. There many poems in the Prologue. Due to a defect in my character, I'm not really a fan of poetry, but say Nikolai's words about power resonated in me:

He was even more powerful than his mighty son—
For those who do not sin are always more powerful.
Earthly power always ends without a glimmer,
But there is no end to heavenly power.

We need to remember that the powerful and the proud will end their lives as unknowns blotted out of the book of life, and like the rich man will have no name. Why is it that we sinners are jealous of those with power? We should instead be "jealous" of those with piety and holiness and emulate them.

There is much more in this wonderful Prologue entry for November 11. You should read all of it. I want to bring to your attention one more thing about King Stefan. A reflection in today's prologue speaks about his wisdom and his gentleness and that he was trusted as an advisor by the Emperor. This was around the time of the hideous heresies of the Latinizing monk Barlaam, whom St. Gregory Palamas battled with. Sometimes, people ask us what is the difference between Orthodoxy and some other religion that labels itself as Christian. If you understand the teaching of St. Gregory Palamas, this is one of the greatest differences. St. Stephan was instrumental in defeating Barlaam because the Emperor asked what to do about him and Bishop Nikolai tells us of the response of this meek and gentle man: "The wise Stefan replied with the words of the Psalmist: Do not I hate them, O Lord, that hate Thee? (Psalm 139:21), and also said: 'Dangerous men must be banished from society.' Heeding this, Emperor Cantacuzene drove Barlaam from the capital with dishonor."

In our age, giving license to sin is confused with supposed gentleness. May we have the wisdom to know when to be firm, and the courage to never contradict the truth.

Use the link to the prologue entry for today, and read with humility and longing and learn something that will make you better today:

<http://westserbdio.org/en/prologue/690-november-11?tmpl=component&print=1&page=>

You can read any selection from the Prologue by going to the following link, and entering the date: http://www.rocor.org.au/?page_id=925

Please keep in mind that the dates are the church calendar. Don't pay attention to the day that the calendar shows. If you follow the new calendar, just enter the civil date that you're interested in. If you follow the old calendar, you need to be able to do math if you know the civil (Joe's garage calendar) date. You must subtract 13 days from that date get the church calendar date.

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