

# SATURDAY OF SOULS

by

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In both the Greek and Slavonic editions of the *Triodion*, the liturgical book that is used in Orthodox Christian churches during the season of Great Lent, on the Saturday before Meat-fare Sunday we celebrate a Memorial Service for all the souls that have departed. This is called "the Saturday of Souls."

After the sixth ode of Matins, there is the *Synaxarion*, that is, the commemoration and account concerning the saint or the liturgical event of the day. This, in part, is what we read in the *Triodion* in the account concerning the Saturday of Souls:

We always remember the souls of the dead on the Sabbath, for the Sabbath (Saturday) is the day of rest. In Hebrew, Sabbath literally means "rest." As the Jews had this day for their repose and paused from every work and professional dealing, we Christians have it to remember the repose of our fathers and brethren. On this day, we hold memorial services and have koliva blessed in the church, give alms, and perform various works of mercy. All these practices are of great benefit to the departed souls. Since the Orthodox Church does not celebrate Divine Liturgies on weekdays during Great Lent where the dead can be commemorated, the second, third, and fourth Saturdays of the Fast are designated as Soul Saturdays.

There are many proofs that the souls of the departed can be greatly benefited by what is done in their behalf. St. Macarios the Egyptian once saw the dry skull of a pagan by the road on his way, and asked, saying, "Do you ever have any kind of consolation in Hades?" And the skull answered, "Yes, Father, especially when you pray for the sake of the dead; abundant is the comfort which we then enjoy." The great man became very happy, because he always prayed for the dead and wished to be assured of the results of his intercessions.

Another saint, Gregory the Dialogist, saved the Roman Emperor Trajan through his prayers, although he heard

from God never to pray like that on behalf of an impious non-Christian again. Also Theodora the Empress, by the prayers of the holy men and confessors, saved her husband, the iconoclast Emperor Theophilus abhorred by God, from the everlasting torments.\*

### The Greek Text

Ἐν Σαββάτῳ δὲ αἰεὶ τὴν τῶν ψυχῶν μνειάν ποιούμεθα, ὅτι τὸ Σάββατον, κατάπαυσιν σημαίνει Ἑβραϊστί· καὶ τῶν τεθνεώτων τοίνυν ὡς τῶν βιοτικῶν καὶ τῶν λοιπῶν ἀπάντων καταπαυσαμένων, κἂν τῇ καταπαυσίμῳ τῶν ἡμερῶν, τὰς ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν δεήσεις ποιούμεθα, ὅ δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ πᾶν κεκράτηκε γίνεσθαι Σάββατον. Τὸ δὲ γε νῦν, καθολικῶς μνημονεύομεν, ὑπὲρ παντός δεόμενοι εὐσεβοῦς· εἰδότες καὶ γὰρ οἱ θεῖοι Πατέρες, ὡς τὰ ὑπὲρ τῶν κεκοιμημένων γινόμενα, μνημόσυνα λέγω, ἐλεημοσύναι, καὶ λειτουργίαι, μεγάλην αὐτοῖς παρέχει ἄνεσιν καὶ ὠφέλειαν, καὶ ἰδίως, καὶ κοινῇ τὴν Ἐκκλησίαν τοῦτο ποιεῖν επιτρέπουσι, παρὰ τῶν ἁγίων Ἀποστόλων τοῦτο παραλαβόντες, ὡς εἴρηται, καθὰ καὶ ὁ Ἀρεοπαγίτης φησὶ Διονύσιος.

Ὅτι δὲ ὠφελεῖ τὰς ψυχὰς τὰ ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν γινόμενα, δῆλον μὲν καὶ ἐξ ἄλλων πολλῶν, ἀλλὰ δὴ καὶ ἐκ τῆς κατὰ τὸν ἅγιον Μακάριον ἱστορίας. Ὅς ἀνδρὸς ἀσεβοῦς Ἕλληνος ξηρὸν κρανίον, κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν παριῶν εὗρηκώς, ἤρθετο. Εἶ τινα ποτε ἐν Ἄδῃ παραμυθίας αἰσθησὶν ἔχουσι; Τὸ δὲ ἀπεκρίνατο, πολλὴν αὐτοῦς ἔχειν ἄνεσιν, ἡνίκα ὑπὲρ τῶν Κεκοιμημένων εὐχῇ, Πάτερ, εἰπὼν. Ἦν γὰρ τοῦτο ποιῶν ὁ μέγας, καὶ δεόμενος τοῦ Θεοῦ, μαθεῖν ἐπιέμενος, εἰ ὠφέλειά τις τοῖς προκεκοιμημένοις ἐντεῦθεν ἐγίνετο. Ἀλλὰ καὶ Γρηγόριος ὁ Διαλόγος, διὰ προσευχῆς, τὸν Βασιλέα Τραϊανὸν σέσωκεν ἀκούσας παρὰ Θεοῦ, μὴ ἄλλοτέ ποτε αὐτὸν ὑπὲρ ἀσεβοῦς δεηθῆναι. Ναὶ μὴν, τὸν καὶ θεοστυγῆ Θεόφιλον, Θεοδώρα ἡ Βασιλίς, διὰ τῶν ἁγίων καὶ ὁμολογητῶν Ἀνδρῶν, τῶν βασάνων ἐξήρπασε καὶ διέσωσεν, ὡς ἱστοροῦται.

\* Copyright, *Synaxarion of the Lenten Triodion and Pentecostarion*, edited by Fr. David Kidd and Mother Gabiella Ursache; HDM Press, Rives Junction, Michigan, 1999, pp. 25-26.

## The Slavonic Text

Въ сѣвѣотѣ же прїснѣ душамъ пѣмать творимъ, ꙗко сѣвѣота  
оупокоенїе знаменуетъ єврейскѣ. И оумѣршихъ оубѣ, ꙗко ѿ  
житѣйскнхъ и прочнхъ всѣхъ оупокоившихъ и въ поконцнѣмъ  
днѣ, за нхъ мольбы творимъ, еже оубѣ и на всѣхъ оудержася  
бывати сѣвѣотѣ: а еже нынѣ соборнѣ помнѣемъ, за всѣаго  
молѣсѣа бл҃гочестнѣаго. Вѣдѣще оубѣ ежественнїи Отцы, ꙗко  
ꙗже за оусѣпнхъ бываема пѣмать, глаголю, мѣлштынн и  
слѣжбы, великѣ тѣмъ подайтъ ѡслабѣ и пользѣ: и Особнѣ и  
Обще сїе цѣрквн творити поощають, ѿ стѣхъ аплѣ сїе прїемше,  
ꙗко речеа. ꙗкоже и археопаритъ глаголетъ дїонусїи: ꙗко поль-  
зуютъ души ѡ нхъ бываема. ꙗвѣ оубѣ и ѿ ннхъ многнхъ.

Но и ѿ повѣсти по стѣмъ макарію, ꙗже мѣжа нечестнѣа єллина  
сѣхъ лѣннѣ на пѣтн мнмоходѣ ѡверѣтъ, вопрошаше: ꙗще нѣкое  
когда во ѡдѣ оутѣшенїа чѣство имѣтъ; Тѣмъ же ѡвѣща: многѣ  
тѣмъ ѡслабѣ имѣти, вегда за оусѣпнхъ молншнѣа Отче,  
рекши. Бѣше бо сїе творѣа великїи и молѣсѣа вѣдѣ, оубѣдати  
желѣа, ꙗще польза нѣкаа преждеошымъ ѡсюдѣ бысть. Но и  
григорїи вѣдѣдовникъ, мѣтвомъ царѣ траїана спсѣ, слышавъ ѿ  
бѣа, никогдаже ємѣ ѡ нечестнѣмъ молншнѣа. Ён оубѣ, и вѣо-  
мѣрзкаго деофїла деодѣра царнѣа стѣмн мѣжн и исповѣдникн  
ѿ мѣченїи исхнти и спсѣ, ꙗкоже повѣствовѣа.