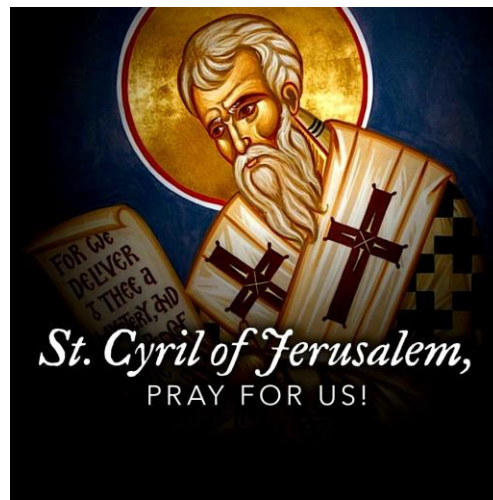


St. Cyril of Jerusalem



"Make your fold with the sheep; flee from the wolves: depart not from the Church," Cyril admonished catechumens surrounded by heresy. These were prophetic words for Cyril was to be hounded by enemies and heretics for most of his life, and although they could exile him from his diocese he never left his beloved Church.

Cyril's life began a few years before Arianism (the heresy that Jesus was not divine or one in being with the Father) and he lived to see its suppression and condemnation at the end of his life. In between he was the victim of many of the power struggles that took place.

We know little about Cyril's early life. Historians estimate he was born about 315 and that he was brought up in Jerusalem. He speaks about the appearance of the sites of the Nativity and Holy Sepulchre before they were "improved" by human hands as if he were a witness. All we know of his family were that his parents were probably Christians and he seemed to care for them a great deal. He exhorted catechumens to honor parents "for however much we may repay them, yet we can never be to them what they as parents have been to us." We know he also had a sister and a nephew, Gelasius, who became a bishop and a saint.

He speaks as one who belonged to a group called the Solitaries. These were men who lived in their own houses in the cities but practiced a life of complete chastity, ascetism, and service.

After being ordained a deacon and then a priest, his bishop Saint Maximus respected him enough to put him in charge of the instruction of catechumens. We still have these catechetical lectures of Cyril's that were written down by someone in the congregation. When speaking of so many mysteries, Cyril anticipated the question, "But some one will say, If the Divine substance is incomprehensible, why then do you discourse of these things? So then, because I cannot drink up all the river, am I not even to take in moderation what is expedient for me? Because with eyes so constituted as mine I cannot take in all the sun, am I not even to look upon it enough to satisfy my wants? Or again, because I have entered into a great garden, and cannot eat all the supply of fruits, would you have me go away altogether hungry?.. I am attempting now to glorify the Lord, but not to describe him, knowing nevertheless that I shall fall short of glorifying God worthily, yet deeming it a work of piety even to attempt it at all."

When Maximus died, Cyril was consecrated as bishop of Jerusalem. Because he was supported by the Arian bishop of Caesarea, Acacius, the orthodox criticized the appointment and the Arians thought they had a friend. Both factions were wrong, but Cyril wound up in the middle. When a famine hit Jerusalem, the poor turned to Cyril for help. Cyril, seeing the poor starving to death and having no money, sold some of the goods of the churches. This was something that other saints including Ambrose and Augustine had done and it probably saved many lives. There were rumors, however, that some of the vestments wound up as clothing for actors.

Actually, the initial cause of the falling out between Acacius and Cyril was territory not beliefs. As bishop of Caesarea, Acacia had authority over all the bishops of Palestine. Cyril argued that his authority did not include Jerusalem because Jerusalem was an "apostolic see" -- one of the original sees set up by the apostles. When Cyril did not appear at councils that Acacius called, Acacius accused him of selling church goods to raise money and had him banished.

Cyril stayed in Tarsus while waiting for an appeal. Constantius called a council where the appeal was supposed to take place. The council consisted of orthodox, Arians, and semi-Arian bishops. When Acacius and his faction saw that Cyril and other exiled orthodox bishops were attending, they demanded that the persecuted bishops leave. Acacius walked out when the demand was not met. The other bishops prevailed on Cyril and the others to give in to this point because they didn't want Acacius to have reason to deny the validity of the council. Acacius returned but left again for good when his creed was rejected -- and refused to come back even to give testimony against his enemy Cyril. The result of the council was the Acacius and the other Arian bishops were condemned. There's no final judgment on Cyril's case but it was probably thrown out when Acacius refused to testify and Cyril returned to Jerusalem.

This was not the end of Cyril's troubles because Acacius carried his story to the emperor -- embellishing it with details that it was a gift of the emperor's that was sold to a dancer who died wearing the robe. This brought about a new synod run by Acacius who now had him banished again on the basis of what some bishops of Tarsus had done while Cyril was there.

This exile lasted until Julian became emperor and recalled all exiled bishops, orthodox or Arian. Some said this was to exacerbate tension in the Church and increase his imperial power. So Cyril returned to Jerusalem. When Acacius died, each faction nominated their own replacement for Caesarea. Cyril appointed his nephew Gelasius -- which may seem like nepotism, except that all orthodox sources spoke of Gelasius' holiness. A year later both Cyril and Gelasius were driven out of Palestine again as the new emperor's consul reversed Julian's ruling.

Eleven years later, Cyril was allowed to go back to find a Jerusalem destroyed by heresy and strife. He was never able to put things completely right. He did attend the Council at Constantinople in 381 where the Nicene Creed and orthodoxy triumphed and Arianism was finally condemned. Cyril received justice at the same Council who cleared him of all previous rumors and commended him for fighting "a good fight in various places against the Arians."

Cyril had eight years of peace in Jerusalem before he died in 386, at about seventy years old.