



## Commemoration of the Saints, Divine Liturgy

### *Our Father* *Abba Severus* **СЕРИОС**

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**T**hroughout our history, our church has been blessed with many great saints from whom we can take example and learn a huge amount. One such saint is the defender of our Orthodox faith, St Severus. St Severus was the Patriarch of Antioch (an ancient city on the coast of the Mediterranean that was located in what is now Turkey), and is one of the great fathers of the Oriental Orthodox Churches. Even though he was the patriarch of our sister, the Syrian Orthodox Church, out of reverence for this awesome saint, our Coptic Orthodox Church acknowledges his name among our canonized saints and also in the Holy Synod, right after St Mark, our first patriarch.

St Severus is included in our Synaxarium three times. We also recite his name during the Commemoration of the Saints in the Holy Divine Liturgy. During his lifetime, St Severus defended the Orthodox faith fervently.

In the year A.D. 465 in Persia, St Severus was born to wealthy pagan parents. His grandfather, whose name was also Severus, saw in a vision someone telling him, "The child who is for your son will strengthen Orthodoxy, and his name will be after your name." When his son had this saint, he called him Severus. The name "Severus" in Greek is translated to mean "priest of the time".

He went to Alexandria to study the Greek wisdom and church subjects; he completed his education in Beirut. There he met a group of Christian students and began to study the writings of St Gregory and St Basil. Shortly after this, he was baptized in Tripoli in Syria.

This period of time was one of confusion and persecution for the Church because it was directly following the Council of Chalcedon (A.D. 451). St Severus grew up in this chaotic environment, yet he strongly opposed the decisions of that council. He expressed forcefully and clearly the Oriental Orthodox beliefs. After his baptism, St Severus' outlook on life became more spiritual, and he spent much of his time in church. Even though he qualified as a lawyer because of his high education, St Severus sought an ascetic life as a monk in the monastery of St Romanus in Jerusalem, where he showed great piety and holiness. He divided his

possessions among his brothers, gave to the poor, and dedicated his life to monasticism.

St Severus was sent to Constantinople in the year A.D. 508, and he wrote his first major work there. Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire, and while St Severus was there, he caught the attention of Emperor Anastasius. St Severus was consecrated patriarch in A.D. 512. He continued his ascetic manner of life even as Patriarch. He demolished the luxuries previous bishops had built in the Episcopal Residence.

Because of his Nicene Orthodox faith and his opposition of Chalcedon, St Severus endured severe persecution. Even though he unquestionably stood strong in argument, he still remained tolerant and peaceable while dealing with his opponents.

The next emperor, Emperor Justinian, ordered him arrested and his tongue cut off, but the Orthodox God-loving Empress Theodora pleaded with him to escape and save his life. Out of obedience to the queen, St Severus fled to Egypt in the year A.D. 518 with some of his bishops. The emperor sent soldiers to seek St Severus, but the Lord protected him from them, and they did not see him even though they stood near.

In Egypt, he spent the rest of his days disguised as a monk, going from place to place and from monastery to monastery to teach and confirm believers in the true faith. During this time, he wrote some of his most famous works. These works today are a source of study and proof of Oriental Orthodox beliefs. Through him, God produced many miracles and wonders. St Severus taught and wrote about the "one incarnate nature of God", and was a disciple and advocate of St Cyril.

Much controversy arises about the idea of Divinity and Humanity in one essence. St Severus' writings clear this confusion by explaining our Orthodox beliefs correctly. He strengthened the faith of the believers in the Orthodox doctrine. Finally, in the city of Sakha in A.D. 538, St Severus passed away at age 73 while dwelling in the house of the



righteous Dorotheus (where he was hiding), and his body was relocated to El-Zugag Monastery of Glass near Alexandria. God worked miracles on the ship his body was carried on and also showed great signs and wonders through the body of His saint Abba Severus after his departure.

Our Synaxarium mentions St Severus three times. On the 2nd of Babah, we celebrate his coming to Egypt; on the 10th of Kiahk, we commemorate the entombing of his body in the Monastery of the Glass; and on the 14th of Amshir (A.D. 538), we commemorate his departure.

Through our struggle to reach our ultimate goal, we're offered many examples to follow and much advice that is needed. We, as youth, can benefit exceedingly from the lives of holy fathers, like St Severus. The first point to recognize and learn from is the fact that St Severus left his pagan parents and became baptized in the true faith. This teaches us to always put God's Will first.

Of course, obedience to our parents is a commandment. The only time we are exempted from obeying is when their will conflicts with God's Will. In this case, we undoubtedly choose God's Will. An important thing to also remember is that this does not permit us to think lowly of our parents or to treat them with disrespect. No one is sinless, and as youth, it is easy to fall into the sin of disrespecting our parents and excusing our behavior with God's will. Instead, we should honor, respect, and love them nonetheless, and pray for them continually. This is a valuable lesson I have learned.

The next point to look at is St Severus' devotion to acquiring the knowledge of our Orthodox faith. From the very beginning, St Severus was eager and willing to learn and understand every aspect of our church. Even at a young age, when many things could have distracted him, he was devoted to being educated in the true faith out of his love for Christ. How many of us can say that we are this devoted and put every effort into learning about our church?

Times have changed, and our opportunities and resources have multiplied immensely. Now we have every chance and source to seek knowledge and get equipped with

answers: books, Holy Bible, Holy Bible on CD, internet websites, our teachers and Abouna in church, articles in magazines like Mighty Arrows that we skip over, and so much more. We are still lazy and distracted easily. Let us all pray to become more motivated and take advantage of all the opportunities we have to learn about the wonders of our faith.

Not only did St Severus dedicate himself to learning, but he also used this acquired knowledge in contemplation and prayer to differentiate between the true councils and the heresies. God granted him the wisdom to understand His Mysteries and distinguish between true teachings and unorthodox ones. He defended our church tremendously. Nothing stopped him or discouraged him from his path.

We should take the knowledge God gives us of His grace, contemplate and reflect on it, and use it in spreading the truth. Even though the times were very rough and persecution was a risk at all times, he still did not sway from his love for God and our faith. We don't have a constant threat of being killed, yet even still, we lack the devotion St Severus had. Let us pray that through the Holy Spirit, we'll have the same wisdom St Severus had and the will to stand up against all evil. For with wisdom and knowledge, comes renewed faith. **"The grace that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."** (James 3:17)

Another thing to look at is the way St Severus defended our faith. He proclaimed the truth powerfully without hesitation, confusion, or fear of any kind; he didn't agree or give in to false doctrine because of pressures, and yet he still remained tolerant and peaceable with his opposition. This teaches us a lesson about evangelism and bringing others to the Lord Jesus Christ.

We should first pray for the wisdom and knowledge, and through the Holy Spirit, we should speak the truth without hesitation, confusion, or fear. Many times, we would rather not talk about our religion because of the reaction it may render from others. We are scared of ruining our image. St



Severus teaches us, though, to take the blessings and joys of bringing another to the Lord Jesus Christ. Also, the way St Severus handled his opposition gives us a great example. Our Lord Jesus Christ said, **“...love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you” (Matthew 5:44).** We should do unto others as we want done unto ourselves. This means showing love, patience, tolerance, and peace to all, even to those who persecute us and even in the strongest of disagreements.

Because St Severus was highly educated, he qualified to be a lawyer in his time. Even though this job offered worldly prestige and praise, he decided his spiritual life was more important and resolved to monasticism. We see this and learn that we should always think of our spiritual lives first. Before making any decision or going for any endeavor, God wants us to pray and really consider how our spiritual lives will be affected by it.

When we find ourselves in a situation that could cause us to fall into sin or temptation, even though it may not be evident at first, we should pull ourselves away and follow the path that helps us grow spiritually. In St Severus' case, he gave up the worldly pride he would get from becoming a lawyer for the spiritual growth and closeness to God that he would have as a monk. He experienced the beauty of silence and solitude. In all our lives, we should dedicate some time to be in complete solitude and silence, so that we are left with God alone to meditate and reflect on ourselves.

Even after St Severus was consecrated Patriarch, he maintained his ascetic manner of life. He demolished all the luxuries given to bishops in the Episcopal Residence and lived a pious life. This shows us that even when we are in a high position, we should live humbly as our Lord did and not become attached to worldly pleasures. Our Lord Jesus Christ reminds us not to worry about everyday things like what we will eat and what we will wear. He reminds us to **“seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to us.” (Matthew 6:33)** The Lord Jesus also taught us: **“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on Earth, where moth and rust**

**destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” (Matthew 6:19-20)**

St Severus followed these words of the Lord Jesus Christ by not wanting the royal lifestyle that was given to him, but instead seeking the heavenly treasures and trusting that God would care of the rest. We learn from this to look past the troubles of the day. We should not stress about what we will eat and drink or worry about our outward appearance because these worldly pleasures are worth nothing. Our rewards are in our treasures in Heaven. When we seek them first, all these things will be added unto us.

When the new Chalcedonian Emperor Justinian took reign, he offered St Severus many luxuries in exchange that he converts to his religion, but St Severus refused. This can be related directly to our lives as youth. The devil gives us so many offers daily, deceiving traps that get us where we're weakest, especially while we're fasting and trying to get closer to God. We have to pray to recognize all these traps and pray also for the strength to overcome each one.

The emperor became angry, but St Severus did not fear his anger and did not change his disposition. Again, we learn that we should not fear men as we are doing God's will. In Psalm 56:4, David the Psalmist says, **“In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?”** When we love Christ with all our hearts and we place all our faith and trust in him unquestionably, what have we to fear?

God controls all and is the creator of all. When we have His divine protection, what armies of humans can defeat us? As St Severus did not fear the emperor's anger, we should not fear the displeasure of those who oppose God. We should never be intimidated as long as we have confidence that He is our ultimate protector. **“Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9)**

When the emperor decreed that St Severus be killed, the Empress Theodora knew about it and warned St Severus,



pleading with him to flee and save his life. However, St Severus did not want to do this; he wished to take advantage of the opportunity to die for the Lord Jesus Christ holding the Orthodox faith and receiving the crown of martyrdom. He refused offers to flee until finally his brethren insisted along with the queen.

Out of obedience, St Severus agreed to go to Egypt. From this, we learn to be ready to die holding our Orthodox faith as St Severus was ready. We also learn obedience. It is very important that we obey our elders and those in authority, for obedience is a virtue required of us as long as it complies with God's will. Obedience also negates the self-will, therefore always giving rise to humility.

This leads to the last point, which deals with St Severus' humility. One day, St Severus went to Wadi-El Natroun and entered a church in the uniform of a stranger monk instead of the Patriarch. A great miracle took place right then. The priest of the church placed the Orban on the altar and went around the church censuring. After the reading of the Holy Epistles and the Holy Gospel, he lifted off the Ebrospharin, and did not find the Orban in the paten. So, the priest became disturbed and wept. He turned towards the congregation and told them what happened. The people also wept thinking that this happened because of their sins.

Right then, the Angel of the Lord appeared to the priest and told him the reason for this occurrence. The angel explained that the Orban was taken away because it was offered in the presence of the Patriarch. Surprised, the priest looked around for St Severus who was disguised as a monk in the corner of the church. Then the priest recognized him by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and he came to Abba Severus pleading with him to continue the Divine Liturgy. He then brought Abba Severus to the altar with great honor, and the Orban was found back on the paten as before. They all praised God and glorified His Holy Name.

The lesson to be learned from this is, of course, humility. Even though St Severus was the Patriarch, he wished to dress as a normal monk and enjoy the Divine Liturgy humbly. Even when he was due glory, he wanted to deny it

and be one with the rest. For Our Lord himself said, **"Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."** (Luke 14:11) This verse tells us plainly that if we glorify ourselves, God will humble us; but if we humble ourselves, God will exalt us.

St Severus teaches us how to deal with our pride and not allow it to bring us down spiritually. When we are in a high position or do something deserving praise, especially if we know it pleases God, it is very easy to become too proud and forget our humility. According to teachings from our Fathers, pride is a deadly sin. Pride alone caused an angel to fall from Heaven.

It creeps into the soul of the righteous person who feels the first twinge of satisfaction in having behaved well. This is especially true during fasting and times when we are really concentrating on our relationship with God. The more we willfully abstain from food and sin during fasting and the more we pray and worship God, the more we feel that we are doing well and become proud of ourselves spiritually. Then we lose our humility.

This is where we really need to keep a watch on ourselves and continually pray and praise God to be constantly reminded that we are nothing on our own. Humility is so important; a Desert Father once said that if during fasting, we start to feel proud of ourselves because we are staying away from desirable food, we should stop immediately and eat meat, for it is better to eat meat than to have inflated ideas about ourselves. So, we should take the example of St Severus' humility and control our pride by putting ourselves below others. As the venerable St Nilus of Sinai once said, "We should rejoice at having performed the virtues, but not become exalted, lest arriving at the pier, we suffer a shipwreck."

May the Lord grant us the same devotion that St Severus had to serve him; may He grant to us his humility, steadfastness, and wisdom; may He grant to us the knowledge of His infinite grace; and may the prayers and blessings of St Severus be with us all. Glory be to God forever. Amen.