



Holiness of Hymns and Purity of Praises

St Macrina

ΦΗΘΟΥΑΒ ΜΑCΡΙΝΑ

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St Macrina comes from a family of three other canonized saints, which include St Basil the Great, St Gregory of Nyssa and St Peter of Sebaste. We celebrate her feast on July 19.

St Macrina was the first child of a prominently wealthy lawyer, Basil, and mother, Emmelia, who had a total of five girls and five boys.

Emmelia dreamt she saw St Thecla, St Paul's associate, while she was in labor. Therefore, Emmelia named her child iMacrinaî after her grandmother, but gave her iTheclaî as a private name which may have been an indication of her aptitude to virginity.

The following hymn rightly describes the life of St Macrina:

 **iSince the light of righteousness shone brightly in you, you were an example of the life of piety for all, teaching the virtues to them that cry, ÆRejoice Macrina he boast of virginity.î (Kontakion: Fourth Tone)**

Her light of righteousness shone brightlyî to her brother Gregory in a dream he saw repeated three times before her death. In the vision, he saw her carrying the relics of the forty martyrs and the relics gleamed like sunlight flashing in a mirror blinding his own eyes. Not only was she chaste, but poor. When Gregory was to bury her, he could find no other items in her room to change her into. All she owned was on her body: an iron cross, cloak, hood, worn shoes, and a ring with a splinter of the True Cross.

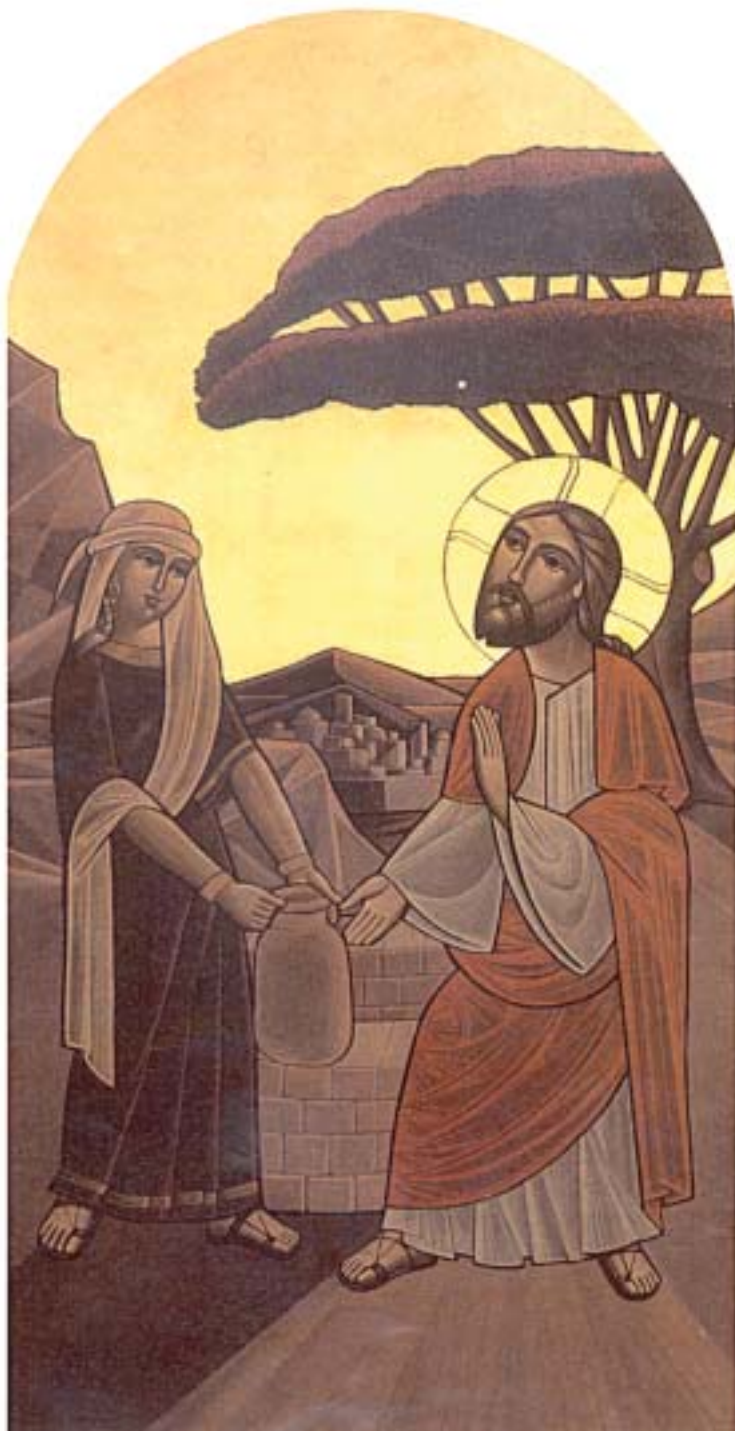
Her light also had shown brightly to Basil her brother. When Basil graduated from the University in Athens and came home, Macrina confronted him concerning his spiritual life. She accused him of ibeing puffed up beyond measure with the pride of oratory.î She complained that he looked down on the local dignitaries and believed himself better than anyone else in Caesarea. He seemed to only be quoting classical literature to her and showing no desire to follow the Christian traditions of the family. Basil was overwhelmed, renounced his chair of rhetoric at the University of Caesarea, and sat at his sister's feet, learning

from her the secret of renunciation and Christian virtue that had eluded him in Athens. A chastened Basil progressed to become St Basil the Great.

As ian example of the life of piety for all,î Macrina began the first monastic community. She established it in Annesi after her brother Naucratiusi death encouraging her mother to adopt her own standard of humility. She induced her to live on a footing of equality with the staff of maids, so as to share with them in the same food, the same kind of bed, and in all the necessities of life, without any regard to differences of rank. Macrina lived this form of piety from the belief that one must renounce the body, renounce wealth, renounce rank, renounce all things for the sake of the Lord Jesus Christ. One must live for God alone, and there must be no other thoughts except the thought of God. All were equals before God, and all must share equally in the worship of God. Macrina firmly stressed that a community of devoted Christians, living in continence and under the strictest discipline, served God better than the hermits suffering from a fierce and independent spirit.

She was always, iteaching the virtues to them that cry.î She taught her mother the virtue of piety. She taught Basil the virtue of renunciation. She taught Gregory the most. In her dying moments, Gregory and Macrina had an in depth conversation concerning death, the soul and resurrection. One of his hundreds of questions was iWhat is the purpose of life?î Macrina responds, iLove.î He asks, iWhat is Love?î Macrina states, iLove is the foremost of all excellent achievements and the first of the commandments of the Law. Love is the life of God, and it cannot be otherwise, since perfect beauty is necessarily lovable to those who recognize it; and out of this recognition comes love. The insolence of saietiy cannot touch this perfect beauty, nor can saietiy ever put a stop to manis power to love what is entirely beautiful; and so the life of God consists in the eternal practice of love; and this life is wholly beautiful, possessed of a loving disposition toward beauty and never receiving any check in the practice of love. And because beauty is boundless, love shall never cease.î

St Gregory recanted the entire conversation in his book,

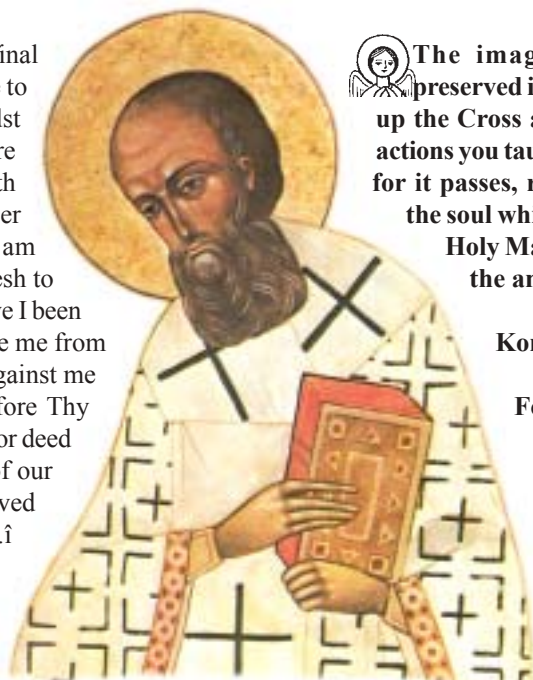


“Since the light of righteousness shone brightly in you, you were an example of the life of piety for all, teaching the virtues to them that cry, ‘Rejoice Macrina he boast of virginity.’” (Kontakion: Fourth Tone)




On the Soul and the Resurrection. Her final prayer to the Lord relays her fervent love to the Lord Jesus Christ, iO thou that didst break the flaming sword and didst restore to Paradise Him who was crucified with Thee and implored Thy mercies, remember me, too, in Thy Kingdom; for I, too, am crucified with Thee. I have nailed my flesh to my fear of Thee, and of Thy judgment have I been afraid. Let not the terrible abyss separate me from Thy elect. Nor let the Slanderer stand against me in the way; nor let my sin be found before Thy eyes, if in anything I have sinned in word or deed or thought, led astray by the weakness of our human nature. And may my soul be received into Thy hands as an offering unto Thee.†

In closing, may we sing this hymn to express our awe and love towards St Macrina's life of strife to be with the Lord Jesus Christ.





St Gregory the Theologian

 **The image of God, was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up the Cross and followed ChriSt By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Macrina, your soul rejoices with the angels.**

Kontakion:

Fourth Tone

 **Since the light of righteousness shone brightly in thee, thou wast an example of the life of piety for all, teaching the virtues to them that cry: Rejoice, Macrina, thou boast of virginity.**

 **iThe image of God was faithfully preserved in you, O Mother. For you took up to the Cross and followed Christ . By Your actions you taught us to look beyond the flesh for it passes, rather to be concerned about the soul, which is immortal. Wherefore, O Holy Macrina, your soul rejoices with the angels.† (Apolytikion: Plagal of the 4th Tone)**

May her prayers be with us all Amen.

Sources:

1. Medieval sourcebook: Gregory of Nyssa: Life of Macrina
2. On the Soul and the Resurrection by St Gregory of Nyssa p. 7-9
3. The Holy Fire by Robert Payne p. 112-118, 160-163
4. Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America Website

Apolytikion:

Plagal of the 4th Tone

Reading:

Saint Macrina, the elder sister of Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nyssa, was sought after by many as a bride because of her beauty, wisdom, and illustrious birth, and in tender youth was espoused by her parents to a bridegroom of fitting nobility. When her betrothed died, Macrina refused any other suitors, and devoted herself to a life of virginity, asceticism, and prayer. When her brother Basil returned from a brilliant career in the best schools of Constantinople and Athens, puffed up with not a little youthful pride-for knowledge puffeth up-it was the ardent admonitions and holy example of his blessed sister that persuaded him to turn from seeking worldly glory to the service of God. Saint Macrina founded a convent, where she ended her earthly life in the year 379, and was buried by her brother Gregory, who wrote a moving account of her last days and his grief at seeing such a light pass out of the world. ✠