

THE FIRST DAY
OF THE MONTH OF DECEMBER

*The Life of the Holy Righteous
Philaret the Almsgiver*

From *The Great Collection of the Lives of the Saints*,
Volume 4: December, compiled by St. Demetrius of Rostov



Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy, said the Lord; therefore, the blessed Philaret the Almsgiver, who was most merciful to the poor, was deemed worthy by God of abundant mercy. He obtained a rich reward both in this life and that beyond the grave, as we shall learn from the present account.

Saint Philaret lived in the village of Amneia in Paphlagonia. He was born in Galatia to noble parents named George and Anna. Instructed by them from childhood in piety and the fear of the Lord, as a youth Philaret was chaste and adorned with every virtue. Reaching manhood, he married an honorable, well-born, and rich woman named Theoseva, who brought with her a considerable dowry. The couple had three children: a son, John, their first-born, and two daughters, Hypatia and Evanthia. God blessed the righteous Philaret, as He once did Job, multiplying his wealth. Philaret was the owner of large flocks, villages, and fruitful vineyards, and had an abundance of all things. His treasure chests were full, and he had in his house a multitude of servants. Philaret was regarded as one of the greatest nobles of that land. Yet, while the blessed one enjoyed prosperity, he saw that many others lived in the utmost poverty. Moved by compassion, he said to himself with contrition of heart, "Can it be that I have received such blessings from the Lord, only that I may eat and be satisfied, pleasing my belly? Should I not share the great riches God has bestowed upon me, dividing them among the poor, widows, orphans, strangers, and beggars whom the Lord will not be ashamed before angels and men to call His brothers at the dread judgment, saying, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the

least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me? Of what benefit shall my belongings be to me on the day of recompense if I greedily refuse to share them? On that day He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath showed no mercy. Shall my wealth provide me with everlasting food and drink in the age to come? Shall my soft garments serve to clothe me for eternity? No, it cannot be, for the Apostle says, We brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. Therefore, if we can take none of our earthly possessions with us, it is better to loan them to God, entrusting them into the hands of the poor. God will never forsake me, my wife, or my children. Of this the prophet David assures me, saying, I have been young, and now indeed am old, and I have not seen the righteous man forsaken, nor his seed begging bread.

Reasoning thus, the blessed Philaret began to show mercy to the poor, treating them as a father would his children. He fed the hungry, gave drink to the thirsty, clothed the naked, and accepted strangers into his home, offering them warm hospitality. This righteous man became like Abraham of old, who was always ready to entertain strangers, and Lot, who loved the poor. Such a light, which burned brightly with the oil of compassion, could not be hid beneath a bushel, and his fame spread throughout the land. Philaret became known to all, like a city set on a hill.

Those in poverty made haste to flee to him as to a city of refuge; and whoever requested oxen, horses, asses, clothing, food, or anything else found him ready to show compassion. Then God, Who loves mankind, permitted temptation to befall this righteous man, as He once tried His favorite, Job. Philaret's patience was proven, and the saint was purified like gold in a furnace and found worthy of eternal blessings. The Lord caused Philaret's wealth to dwindle, but he did not cease to feel compassion for the poor and to show mercy on them, always giving whatever he could to those who asked of him.

At that time God allowed the Ishmaelites to ravage the country where Philaret lived. Like a whirlwind sweeping through a grove of trees or a fire burning upon a mountain, they passed through the land, laying it waste and taking captive its inhabitants, to whom they did much evil. They took nearly all the animals and slaves belonging to the blessed Philaret, leaving him only a single pair of oxen, a cow, a horse, one manservant, and one maidservant. Furthermore, the wealthy landowners who lived nearby gained possession of his villages, orchards, and fields, in

some instances by force, and in others, by appealing to his liberality. Again, only a single field and the house in which he lived were left to the blessed one, but even as he endured poverty and injustice, this good man never complained or became downcast. Like a second Job, He sinned not, neither charged God foolishly. He rejoiced in penury as another man would in great wealth, because he understood that it is easier for one who is poor to enter the kingdom than for a rich man, according to the word of the Lord: A rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.

One day, the blessed Philaret took his oxen out to plow the field that remained. As he labored, he praised God and joyfully gave thanks to the Lord for permitting him to live by the sweat of his brow, in accordance with the divine and holy commandment, in this way escaping idleness and sloth, those teachers of every evil. He recalled the words of the Apostle, who declared, If any would not work, neither should he eat. At the same time a peasant was plowing nearby. Suddenly one of his oxen began to tremble violently, then fell to the ground and died. The man was cast into sorrow and wept bitterly, because the ox was not his, but was borrowed from a neighbor. Then he remembered the blessed Philaret and said, "If only that merciful man had not fallen into poverty, I would go to him, and he would not give me a single ox, but a pair. Now, however, he has nothing to give those who ask; nevertheless, I will share my sorrow with him. Perhaps he will say something to console me, and ease my burden."

Taking up his staff, the peasant went to Philaret's house. Finding the saint toiling in his field, the villager fell down before him and related with tears in his eyes how the ox had died unexpectedly. The blessed Philaret saw how deeply the man was grieved, and straightway unyoking one of his oxen, said, "Brother, take my ox, plow your field, and give thanks to God."

The peasant bowed down before the blessed one and thanked him for the gift, saying, "Truly, your decision is wondrous and noble, my lord, and your kindness pleasing to God! However, it is not good for the ox to be separated from its companion, since they are accustomed to work together. Each will find it difficult to be alone."

"Take the ox, brother, and go in peace. I have another at home," said the righteous one.

The peasant bowed again before the blessed one and departed, praising God and his merciful benefactor. Taking the yoke upon his shoulders, the honorable Philaret returned with the remaining

ox to his house. As he approached, his wife caught sight of him and asked, “Where is the other ox, my lord?”

Philaret replied, “While I was resting from my labors, I loosed the oxen, to allow them to graze. One of them wandered off and became lost, or perhaps someone took it.”

Hearing this, Philaret’s wife became very upset and immediately sent her son out to search for the ox. The young man walked until he finally came upon it, yoked with that of the peasant, to whom he cried angrily, “Wicked man! How dare you yoke this ox with yours? Where did you find it? Is this not my father’s beast? Like a wolf, you snatched him away and made him your own. If you do not return him to me, I will have you punished as a thief by the authorities!”

“Do not be angry with me, child,” answered the peasant in a meek voice. “You are the son of a holy man; do not stretch forth your hand against me, for I have done you no evil. Your father had compassion on me, seeing my poverty and misfortune, and willingly gave me his ox, because one of my oxen perished unexpectedly while it was working.”

Philaret’s son was filled with shame because he had reproached an innocent man. He hurried back home and told his mother what he had learned. She cried out with tears, “Woe is me! Woe is me, the wife of a heartless man!” Then, tearing her hair, she ran to her husband, shrieking and wailing, “You inhuman, hard-hearted man! Why do you wish to destroy us with hunger? We have lost almost all our possessions because of our sins, and it was only by God’s mercy that two oxen were left us, so that we could feed our children. You are accustomed to wealth and have never labored with your hands, and now, indolent as you are, you intend to remain lying about the house. It was not for God’s sake that you gave away the ox, but for your own, in the hope that you might escape the labor of plowing and instead pass the remainder of your days in idleness. What answer shall you give to the Lord when your children and I perish because of your laziness?”

The blessed Philaret looked at her and said meekly, “Hear what God, Who is rich in mercy, commands us: Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them. Shall He not then feed us, who are much better than fowl? He promises to reward a hundredfold those who give their possessions to the poor for His sake and the Gospel’s. Consider, woman: if for one ox we

shall be given a hundred, why should we grieve for the ox I gave away for the Lord's sake?" The compassionate man said this not because he hoped to be rewarded a hundredfold in this life, but to quiet his fainthearted wife. And indeed, when the woman heard these wise words, she fell silent.

Not five days had passed when the ox that the blessed Philaret had given the peasant ate a deadly plant called hellebore and perished. Not knowing what else to do, the peasant returned to Philaret, fell down before him, and said, "My lord, I have sinned before you and your children by separating your oxen. For this reason the righteous God has prevented me from gaining any benefit from the use of your ox, which ate a poisonous plant and perished."

The blessed Philaret made no reply, but instead brought his remaining ox. Giving it to the villager, he said, "Take this ox, brother. I intend to travel to a faraway country and do not wish that my ox, which is accustomed to work, should stand idle."

The blessed one said this so that the man would accept his gift. As he led the beast away, the peasant marveled at the saint's great compassion; but when these things became known at Philaret's house, his children wailed with their mother, "Our father has no love or mercy for us and has squandered everything we own. God left us a single pair of oxen to save us from starvation, and even this he gave away!"

Philaret replied, "Why, my children, do you lament? Do you wish to break my heart? Why do you call me merciless and think that I intend to see you die of hunger? In a place unknown to you I have such a treasure that even if you should live in idleness to the age of a hundred, it would provide for all your needs. I myself am unable to set a value on the things I have stored up for you." Saying this, the righteous man did not deceive his children, because he foresaw with spiritual vision what would come to pass.

Shortly afterwards an imperial decree was published in the land ordering all troops to assemble in their regiments to meet the godless pagans attacking the Greek Empire. Every soldier was commanded to appear fully armed, with two horses. Among those summoned to battle was a man named Mousoulus. He had fallen into poverty and had only one horse, which stumbled into a chasm and perished just a day before he was due to depart with his regiment. Having no money with which to purchase another horse, the soldier went to the blessed Philaret and pleaded, "Have

mercy, my lord Philaret! I know that hard times have befallen you and you have been left with only a single horse, but for the Lord's sake give him to me. Otherwise, my commander will have me flogged!"

"Take the horse, brother," said Philaret, "and go in peace. I give him to you for God's sake."

The soldier departed with the saint's horse, glorifying God. By now there remained to Philaret only a cow and its calf, an ass, and a few beehives. Then a poor man who had heard of the merciful one came to him from afar, and entreated him, "My lord! Give me as a blessing a calf from your herds. I have been told that whoever receives a gift from you becomes wealthy."

"The holy Philaret gladly brought the calf and gave it to the man, saying, "May God bless you abundantly, brother, and grant you everything you need."

The man bowed down before Philaret and departed. Meanwhile, the cow began to look about for the calf. Unable to find it, she bellowed loudly in sorrow, moving Philaret's entire household to pity. His wife was especially grieved, and lamented, "Who can endure this insanity? Who would not laugh at your foolishness? I see clearly today that you do not love me in the least and that you wish your children to die of hunger. You do not even feel pity for a dumb beast and have taken the calf from our cow when she was still feeding it. Whom do you think you have helped by doing such a thing? You have impoverished us still further and done nothing for the man to whom you gave the calf. Without its mother it will die, and the cow will continue to grieve and bellow. No one will benefit from what you have done."

The honorable Philaret answered his wife in a mild voice, "What you say is true, woman. It was cruel of me to separate the calf from its mother. I shall find a way to undo the wrong." Thereupon he hurried to overtake the man to whom he had given the calf, and catching sight of him, cried, "Come back with the calf, man, for its mother gives us no peace and stands bellowing at our door!"

"Hearing this, the poor man was certain that Philaret wished to take back the calf, and said to himself sorrowfully, "Woe is me! I am unworthy to receive as a blessing from this righteous man even a little calf!"

As the man was returning, the calf caught sight of its mother

and ran toward her. The cow also saw her calf and hurried toward it, calling loudly. When the calf reached its mother, it straightway began to take her milk, remaining for a long time sucking at her teats. Theoseva, Philaret's wife, saw the calf return home, and this made her very pleased. Meanwhile, Philaret, seeing the poor man grieving, said to him, "Brother, my wife says that I have sinned by parting the calf from its mother, and this is true, so take the mother with the calf and go with the Lord's blessing. May He multiply your herds, as He once did mine." The man took the cow and its calf and departed, rejoicing. God indeed blessed his house for the sake of His favorite, Philaret, and he came to possess two large herds of cattle.

Shortly thereafter, famine struck the land. Reduced to the utmost poverty, Philaret had no money left to buy food for his wife and children. Saddling his one remaining ass, he traveled to another part of the country, where a friend of his lived. Philaret borrowed six measures of wheat, which he loaded on the donkey. Then he set off happily on his homeward journey.

As Philaret was resting after his return, a poor man came to the door begging a basket of wheat. The worthy emulator of Abraham went to his wife, who at that moment was sowing some of the wheat, and said to her, "Woman, I would like to give this poor brother a measure of wheat."

"Let me, your children, and the servants each take a measure of wheat first, that we may eat our fill. Then you may give what remains to whomever you wish," she replied.

Philaret laughed at her and asked, "Do I not also need a portion?"

"You are an angel, not a man," said Theoseva, "and have no need of food. If you required food, you would not be so anxious to give away what you have."

The saint nevertheless took two measures of wheat and gave them to the poor man. Seeing this, his wife was unable to restrain herself and cried out angrily, "Give him a third measure! You have enough and to spare!" The blessed Philaret took a third measure, gave it to the poor man, and sent him on his way. His grieving wife took the remaining wheat and divided it with her children. Soon, however, the wheat was gone and they were hungry. Theoseva then went to one of her neighbors and begged half a loaf of bread. She also gathered some goosefoot, which she boiled and served her children with the bread. She shared in the

children's meal, but did not call her husband to the table.

A rich man who had long been a friend of the blessed Philaret heard of the terrible poverty into which the saint had fallen and sent him four cartloads of wheat. Each consisted of ten measures of grain. He also sent Philaret this message: "Beloved brother, I have sent forty measures of wheat for you and your household. When it has been consumed, I will send the same quantity to you again. Pray to the Lord for me!"

The blessed one fell to the ground, lifted up his hands and eyes unto heaven, and praised God, saying, "I thank Thee, O Lord my God, for Thou hast not forsaken Thy servant, nor hast Thou disdained him who hopeth in Thee!"

Seeing that God had shown mercy on them, Philaret's wife ceased to lament, and said to her husband, "My lord, give me and the children our portion of the wheat, and pay back our neighbors what we have taken from them. As for your portion, do with it as you wish."

Philaret did as his wife said and divided the grain, taking as his portion five measures, which he divided within two days among the poor. Again his wife became angry, and not wishing to sit at table with him, ate instead with her children when he was not present. Once it happened that the blessed Philaret came upon them as they were eating, and said, "Children, permit me to share your table, if not as your father, then at least as a guest or stranger."

They laughed at him, but allowed him to sit down. As they were eating, Theoseva asked, "My lord Philaret, when will you show us the treasure which you told us you have hidden? Did you say this to mock us, teasing us like foolish little children with false promises? If what you said is true, show us the treasure. We shall take it, buy food, and eat together as before."

"Wait a little," said the blessed one, "and a rich treasure will indeed be revealed to you."

Philaret was finally reduced to such poverty that he possessed nothing but his hives. If a beggar came to him and he had neither bread nor anything else to give him, the saint would go to his hives and bring the poor man honey. The family continued to eat the honey, but soon it became apparent to the servants that they would be left even without this, so they secretly went to the beehives to collect what remained. They found only a single comb, which they took for themselves. The next morning a pauper came

begging alms of the godly one. Philaret went to the last hive, but found it empty. Having nothing else to give the man, he removed his outer robe and put it on him. When he returned home, clad in a single garment, his wife demanded, “Where is your robe? Did you give it to that beggar?”

“I went to the beehives and left it there,” Philaret replied.

His son then went to the hives and searched for the robe. He told his mother that he did not find it. Unable to bear the sight of her husband clothed only in an undergarment, she draped her own robe over him so that the folds fell in a way befitting a man.

At that time the scepter of the Greek Empire was in the hands of the Christ-loving Empress Irene and her son Constantine. Since Constantine had reached a marriageable age, wise noblemen were sent to every province of the realm to search for a fair, highborn maiden of honorable demeanor who would make a worthy bride for him. Zealous to fulfill the imperial command, the men entrusted with this task tirelessly passed through town and country, stopping even in mean hamlets. As they were approaching Amneia in Paphlagonia, they caught sight of Philaret’s house, for it was the most eminent structure in the village and obviously the home of a nobleman. They ordered their servants to go ahead to prepare for them a meal and a place to sleep at the saint’s house, but one of the soldiers accompanying them said, “Do not go to that house, my lords. Although it is large and beautiful, it is empty. We shall find nothing to eat there, because the old man who lives in it is more generous to the poor than any man alive and has been reduced to poverty.”

The nobles did not believe the soldier, and repeated their command. The blessed Philaret, the true lover of strangers, saw the servants as they approached, and taking his staff, went out to meet them. Bowing to the ground before them, he said joyfully, “My lords, it is good that God has brought you to me, your servant. I count it a great blessing to receive men such as you in my humble home.” Then he hurried back to his wife and said to her, “Theoseva, my lady, prepare a fine supper. I am happy to tell you that noble guests have come to us from afar.”

“With what am I to prepare a fine supper?” she grumbled. “There is not a lamb in our wretched house, nor even a hen. I can only boil some of the goosefoot that we ourselves eat, and that without oil. I can hardly remember when we last had oil, or wine!”

“Do no more than prepare the fire, my lady,” Philaret said. “Make ready the upper chamber, and wash down and polish our old ivory table. God, Who giveth food to all flesh, will provide the supper.”

Theoseva did as her husband told her. Meanwhile, Philaret’s wealthier neighbors learned that noblemen sent by the Emperor had come to his house, and they brought the righteous one sheep, lambs, hens, doves, wine, bread, and other foodstuffs befitting such guests. Theoseva took these things and prepared a rich banquet. Entering the upper room, the guests were amazed to see a beautiful round ivory table, adorned with silver, standing in the middle of a magnificent room; but they especially marveled at the abundant hospitality of their host, who in appearance and manner was like a second Abraham. While sitting at table, they saw that John, the blessed elder’s son, closely resembled his father. They also noticed that Philaret’s grandchildren, who brought food and carried away plates, conducted themselves in a proper manner. They asked the blessed one, “Tell us, O honorable man, do you have a wife?”

“I do, my lords,” he replied, “and this is my son and these my grandsons who stand before you.”

“Bid your wife come here to meet us,” said the Emperor’s men. When Theoseva appeared, they saw that although not young, she was still a handsome woman, and asked, “Do you have any daughters?”

Philaret answered, “I have two, and the elder has three daughters herself.”

The men said, “Bring them here. We have been commissioned to travel throughout the Empire to find a beautiful maiden worthy to marry the Emperor.”

“You will not find such a maiden here, my lords,” said Philaret, “for we are your slaves, poor, insignificant people. Nevertheless, eat now and drink what God has provided; make merry, rest from your journey, and sleep, and in the morning we shall see what the will of the Lord brings.”

The nobles awoke at dawn and called for the blessed Philaret. They said to him, “Sir, bring your granddaughters to us. We wish to see them.”

The saint answered, “Let it be as you wish, my lords; but

agree, if you will, to enter the inner quarters of my home, because the maidens never leave them.”

The men followed Philaret into the rooms where the family lived. There they found the maidens, who greeted them with respectful bows. Seeing that they were more beautiful than any of the young women they had met elsewhere in the Empire, they were delighted and exclaimed, “We thank God for having brought us to the end of our search! Surely one of these virgins will become the bride of the Emperor, for nowhere on earth can there be a maiden fairer than these.”

Because the Emperor was tall, their choice as his bride fell upon Mary, the blessed Philaret’s eldest granddaughter, who was the tallest of the sisters. The Emperor’s men joyfully set off for the Imperial City, accompanied by the maiden, her father and mother, grandfather, and his entire household, thirty persons in all. They also had with them ten other virgins they had chosen, among whom was the comely daughter of the great nobleman Gerontius. While the party was traveling, the chaste and virtuous Mary said to the other maidens, “Sisters, hearken to my counsel! Since we are all being taken to the Emperor for the same purpose, let us make a covenant between us. Only one can be chosen as the Emperor’s consort, so may she whom the King of heaven deems worthy of this lofty rank remember the others upon assuming the imperial dignity, and bestow on them her favor and protection.”

“Let it be known to all of you,” announced Gerontius’ daughter, “that it is I who shall be selected as the Emperor’s bride. I surpass all of you in nobility, wealth, beauty, and intelligence. You have no hope of being chosen. Your pretty faces will not win you a place in the Emperor’s bed, for you are poor, baseborn, ignorant wenches.” Placing her hope in God and the prayers of her holy grandfather, Mary remained silent while the foolish maiden spat out these proud words.

When they arrived at the imperial palace, the noblemen and their charges were announced, and Gerontius’ daughter was taken first before the imperial favorite Stauricius, who was responsible for the administration of the palace. Stauricius questioned her, and quickly perceiving that she was a haughty girl, declared, “You are handsome enough, but not suited to be the Emperor’s wife.” He gave her gifts and sent her home. Thus the words of the Scriptures were fulfilled: Every one that exalteth himself shall

be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Then Mary was taken before the Emperor, together with her mother, grandfather, and the rest of the household. The Emperor, his mother the Empress, and Stauricius were all impressed with the dignity and noble demeanor of the entire family. They were also enchanted by the beauty of Mary's face, which bespoke of meekness, humility, and the fear of God. Such was Mary's modesty that as she stood before them, she blushed red as an apple, and her eyes remained fixed downward, looking at the floor; therefore the Emperor was smitten with love for her and took her as his betrothed. The middle sister was pledged to an eminent patrician named Constanticius, and the youngest was sent with numerous gifts to become the bride of the ruler of the Lombards, so that peace might be established with that tribe. The wedding of Constantine to Mary was celebrated with much delight by the Emperor himself, his nobles, all the people, and the family of the blessed Philaret. During the festivities the Emperor took the elder by the hand and kissed his honorable head. He praised Philaret, his wife, and the members of his household for their piety, and bestowed numerous gifts and honors upon them all. Among the presents were gold and silver, precious stones, costly garments, and great mansions. After the merrymaking was concluded, the Emperor demonstrated his esteem for the blessed one by kissing him again. Then he permitted Philaret to depart to the magnificent home he had given him.

Seeing the rich gifts they had received, Philaret's family and servants remembered that the blessed one said a treasure had been hidden for them. Falling at his feet, they cried, "Forgive us, O lord and master, for having sinned against you, foolishly reproaching you for the generosity you always showed the poor. We now understand the words of Scripture, Blessed is the man that hath understanding for the poor man and the pauper, for everything that he gives to the poor, he gives to God Who rewards him a hundredfold in the present age and grants him life everlasting in that to come. It is because of your compassion for the poor that God has shown mercy on you, and on us as well."

The elder lifted up his hands to heaven and exclaimed, Blessed be the name of the Lord from henceforth and for evermore! Then he said to his family, "Hearken to my counsel: prepare a fine supper, and I shall request our King and Master to come with all His nobles to dine with us."

“May it be as you wish,” they answered.

As the supper was being prepared, the blessed one went out into the streets of the city and brought back to his home all the paupers, lepers, blind, lame, aged, and maimed folk he could find. In all, they numbered two hundred. Leaving them at the gates of the house, he entered alone and said to his family, “Children, the King has come with His nobles. Is everything ready?”

“Everything is prepared,” they replied.

The blessed one signaled to those standing outside to enter. Some took their seat at the table; others he commanded to recline on the floor. It was among the latter that Philaret took his place. His family understood that in speaking of the King, he meant Christ our God Himself, Who had entered their house with the poor. By the King’s nobles he meant all the poor brethren, whose prayers find great favor with God. They marveled at his humility and were amazed that the grandfather of the Empress had not forgotten his former generosity and did not disdain to recline among paupers, whom he served like a slave. They said to him, “Verily, you are a man of God, a true disciple of Christ, Who enjoined us: Learn of Me, for I am meek and lowly in heart.” The blessed one also requested his son John, who had been appointed a member of the imperial bodyguard, and his grandchildren to stand near the table and serve the brethren. Shortly afterwards, Saint Philaret said, “Lo children, you have received from God such riches as you never expected, despite the promise I made to you, hoping in God. Tell me, therefore: what else do you consider that I owe you?”

Recalling his promise, they began to weep, and lamented with one voice, “Truly, our lord, you are God’s favorite and foresaw everything that has come to pass! How foolish we were to have caused you such trouble in your old age! We beg you not to remember the sins we committed in ignorance.”

The blessed one answered, “Children, merciful and compassionate is the Lord, Who rewards us a hundredfold for the paltry alms we give to the poor in His name. Now I say, let each one of you set aside ten gold coins for our poor brethren, if you wish to inherit life eternal. The Lord will accept them as He did the two mites from the widow.” They gladly did as the saint had instructed. Meanwhile, he continued feeding the poor, each of whom was given a gold piece and sent on his way.

Not many days later, the blessed Philaret called for his wife

and children and said to them, “Our Lord commanded us, Occupy till I come. I want you to purchase everything the Emperor has given me, thus enabling me to obey Christ. If you refuse, I will give everything I own directly to my brethren, the poor. I wish no more for myself than to be called the Emperor’s grandfather.”

The saint’s family decided that his possessions were worth sixty pounds of gold, which was the amount they gave him for them. The blessed one distributed what he received to the poor. The Emperor and his nobles learned of this and were very pleased by Philaret’s compassion and generosity to all who asked of him, and thenceforth they began to entrust much gold to him so that he could pass it on to the needy.

The blessed one set out three sacks, identical in appearance. One he filled with gold coins, another with silver, the third with bronze coins. He once left all three with his servant Callistus. A beggar came asking alms, and the saint told Callistus to give him money from one of the sacks. When the servant asked him how he was to know from which sack, the saint replied, “From whichever God commands. He knows the needs of all, rich and poor, and fills every living thing with His favor. It is the Lord Who guides the hand of the giver.”

So saying, the righteous one wished to point out that not all beggars are alike. Some were once wealthy, and through adversity have lost their possessions and come to lack even daily bread. Nevertheless, there still remain to them some of their fine clothes, which they continue to wear to hide their shame at begging. Others wear rags, but have a great deal of money concealed. These have learned that a fortune can be made by begging, and are nothing but extortioners and idolaters. When the blessed one himself gave alms, he would thrust his hand into one of the sacks without looking to see which it was. Whatever he happened to draw out, copper, silver, or gold, he gave to the beggar. “Many times,” the honorable man swore, calling upon God as his witness, “someone clothed in fine garments would come to me, requesting alms, and I stretched out my hand to draw copper coins, thinking that because he was well clothed, he was not really poor; but it involuntarily took silver or gold, which I gave him. At other times I was approached by a beggar in old, tattered clothing, and I intended to give him a large sum of gold, but my hand was directed into one of the other bags, and he received little. These things were ordained by Providence, for God knows

perfectly our needs.”

After four years had passed, the blessed Philaret returned to the palace to visit his granddaughter. He wore neither a robe of purple nor a golden belt. Others had urged him to dress in these, but he answered, “Leave me in peace. I thank my God and glorify His great and wondrous name, because He has raised me up from the dunghill of poverty and honored me with my present lofty estate, making me the grandfather of an empress. This suffices for me.”

Such was the blessed one’s humility that he had no desire for rank or title, and wished only to be called Philaret of Amneia. Finally, having spent his last years humbly distributing alms, Philaret sensed the approach of his blessed end. Apprised by God of his coming decease while still in good health, he secretly called for one of his faithful servants and went with him to the convent called “Rodolfia,” which was inhabited by virgin nuns of pure and honorable life. He gave to the abbess a large quantity of gold for the convent, saying, “I will depart this life in a few days and go to another world, where a different King reigns. Say nothing of this to anyone, but bury my body in a new grave.” He also forbade his servant to speak of his coming death to anyone for the moment. After distributing to the poor whatever he had in his possession, he returned to the convent, where he fell ill and was given a bed. Nine days later he called for his wife, children, and household, and addressed them in a sweet, quiet voice, “Know children, that our holy King has called for me this day. I am about to leave you and go to Him.”

They did not understand, and thinking that he was speaking of the earthly Emperor, protested, “You cannot visit the Emperor today, you are ill!”

“My escorts are here already,” Philaret answered.

Then they understood that he was speaking of the King of heaven, and lamented bitterly, as once did Joseph and his brothers for Jacob, but Philaret motioned them to silence. He began to instruct and console them, saying, “My children, you know how I have lived since my youth. God is my witness that I have not exploited another’s labors, nor boasted because of the wealth God has given me, but have driven pride far away and loved humility, heeding the Apostle, who charged them that are rich in this life not to be high-minded. When I fell into poverty, I neither grieved, nor did I curse God, but like Job thanked Him for having looked upon my patience. I continued to be grateful to Him in adversity,

and He delivered me and made me the friend and kinsman of the Emperor and his princes. Yet even when I was raised to an exalted rank, my heart remained humble, and I heeded the prophet, who said, My heart is not exalted, nor are mine eyes become lofty, nor have I walked in things too great or too marvelous for me. I have not hidden the riches given me by the earthly Emperor, but have sent them to the King of heaven, borne in the arms of the poor; therefore, I implore you to emulate me, beloved, and do whatever you have seen me do. The greater the good you accomplish, the greater the blessedness you will inherit. Place no value on corruptible riches, but send them on to the world unto which I now depart. Leave not your possessions here, lest they fall into the hands of your enemies. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, intercede for widows, come to the aid of orphans, visit the sick and imprisoned, and shun not the services of the Church. Do not take what is another's, do not slander or offend anyone, and do not rejoice at another's misfortune, even your enemy's. Give burial to the dead and have them commemorated in the holy churches. Remember me, the unworthy one, in your prayers as well, until the day of your death and departure unto life eternal." Then the saint said to his son John, "Tell my grandsons to draw nearer," and began to foretell what would happen in their lives. To John's eldest son he said, "You will take a wife in a distant land and live piously with her," and to the second son, "You will take upon yourself the yoke of Christ, living virtuously as a monk for twenty-four years, and then depart unto the Lord"; and he also foretold everything that was to befall the third son. Being a prophet, like the patriarch Jacob in times of old, this blessed man knew with certainty everything that would take place in his grandsons' lives.

John's two virgin daughters approached him as well, saying, "Bless us, grandfather!"

"The Lord bless you," he answered. "You will remain virgins, unsullied by this sin-loving world and the passions of the flesh. After serving the Lord in chastity for a short time, you will be vouchsafed great blessings from Him." Everything the saint predicted came to pass. His granddaughters entered a convent dedicated to the most pure Theotokos in Constantinople, and after struggling in the monastic labors of fasting and vigil for twelve years, reposed in purity almost at the same time, departing peacefully unto the Lord.

The blessed Philaret prayed for his wife, children, his entire

household, and the whole world; then suddenly his face could be seen shining like the sun. He chanted the psalm of David, Of mercy and judgment will I sing to Thee, O Lord, and when it was completed, a sweet odor filled the room, as if someone had poured out a bottle of fragrant perfume. After this he began the prayer, "Our Father, which art in the heavens." Reaching the words, "Thy will be done," he lifted up his arms and surrendered his soul unto the Lord. Philaret was ninety years old when he died; nonetheless, his face was not wizened by age. He remained pleasant to behold, and his cheeks were ruddy as ripe apples.

When he learned of Philaret's death, the Emperor, accompanied by the Empress and his nobles, hastened to the convent. Kissing the blessed one's face and hands, everyone wept copiously. The Emperor immediately issued a command that abundant alms be given to the poor.

As the saint's body was being taken for burial, a strange thing occurred which moved all to tears and contrition of heart. An innumerable multitude of poor folk and beggars descended upon his grave from the cities and villages nearby. Like ants they swarmed around his coffin, hobbling and crawling and trampling one another underfoot. Their cries and lamentations rose up to heaven, and they shouted, "O Lord God, why hast Thou taken from us our father, who ever nurtured us? Who now will feed the hungry? Who will give burial to the bodies of our brethren lying in the streets? It would have been better if we had died before our benefactor!"

Among those who thronged the saint's casket was a pauper named Kavokokus, who often received alms from Philaret. He was possessed from birth by an evil spirit, which frequently cast him into fire or water at the appearance of the new moon, when the demon would torment him most cruelly. Learning that the blessed Philaret had reposed and that his sacred remains lay already in the casket and were being carried to the grave, he set out in pursuit of them. Kavokokus caught up with the coffin, but the demon, enraged by his ardent love for the saint, did not remain idle. It began to torment the man, forcing him to utter blasphemies against Philaret, to bark like a dog at the coffin, and to grab hold of the bier so firmly that it was impossible to pry loose his hands. As soon as the coffin reached the grave, the demon threw the sufferer to the ground and took flight. Kavokokus arose unharmed, praising God; and the people who witnessed the miracle

also marveled and extolled the Lord, Who had given such abundant grace to His servant. The saint's honorable body was then laid to rest. Thus did God glorify His merciful servant in the present age! Now we shall tell how the Lord exalted him in the life beyond the grave.

A relative of Philaret, a wise, pious man who feared God, told this story concerning the saint, vowing the truth of the tale and calling upon God Himself as his witness:

“One night, after the blessed Philaret departed unto God, I beheld an awesome vision and saw myself being taken to a place surpassing all description. A radiant man showed me a dreadful river of fire, which roared as it flowed by. On the far side of the river I saw a marvelous, beautiful garden, a place of ineffable delight, from which came forth a wondrous fragrance. The garden was full of lofty trees, heavy with fruit, which swayed as a gentle breeze blew through them, making a most pleasant sound. No human tongue can tell of the good things there, which God hath prepared for them that love Him. I saw in the garden a multitude of people rejoicing, clad in white garments and enjoying the fruits of tCCChat place, and as I looked more closely, I noticed a man clothed in a bright robe, sitting on a golden throne. It was Philaret, but I did not recognize him. On one side of him stood newly baptized children holding candles; on the other, a crowd of poor folk clothed in white. The latter were pressing against one another, hoping to gain a place closer to the blessed one. Suddenly a young man appeared, his face brilliant with light. His gaze was terrifying, and he held in his hand a staff of gold. Trembling with fear, I somehow found the courage to ask him, 'My lord, who is the man sitting on the throne? Is it Abraham?'

“The shining youth replied, 'It is Philaret of Amneia, who is counted as a second Abraham because of his great love for the poor and his generous almsgiving. He has been assigned a place here because of his pure and honorable life.'

“Then the new Abraham, the holy, righteous Philaret, his face radiant with light, looked upon me and said softly, 'Come here, child. I wish to share these good things with you.'

“I cannot go to you, father,' said I. 'I am afraid of the river of fire. The bridge over it is narrow and difficult to cross. Many people are burning in the river, and I fear that I may fall into it.'

The saint replied, 'Take courage and come; do not fear. There is no way here except by the bridge. Do not be afraid, child; I

will help you.’

“As he called me, he stretched out his hand. I took courage and began to cross, but as soon as I touched his hand, the sweet vision suddenly came to an end, and I awoke. Weeping bitterly, I repeated to myself, ‘How shall I ever cross that dread river and reach the heavenly mansions?’”

After burying the precious body of her husband, the blessed Theoseva, Saint Philaret’s wife, returned to Paphlagonia. She used much of the wealth given her by the Emperor and Empress to rebuild the churches of that land destroyed by the godless Persians. She gave to the restored churches sacred vessels and vestments, and adorned them richly, and also founded monasteries and guesthouses for travelers, where the poor and infirm could find shelter. After some time she returned to Constantinople, where she lived out the rest of her days in virtue and piety. She reposed peacefully in the Lord and was laid in a grave next to her husband. By their prayers, may we also be granted the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ on the day of judgment. Unto Him is due honor and glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, unto the ages of ages. Amen.

