

July 5

Athanasius the Athonite (930-1001) monk

In 1001 Athanasius the Athonite, a monk who brought cenobitic life to Mount Athos, died when a cupola collapsed in his monastery's church.

Born in Trebisonda in present-day Turkey, the young Abraham was orphaned as a child. He studied in Constantinople and became a teacher at the emperor's court. Upon meeting the igumen of a monastery of Bythinia, he recognized his own monastic vocation, and taking the monastic name of Athanasius, he went to live on Mount Athos.

Around the year 961 he began to build the Great Lavra, which became the home of the monks who joined him. Athanasius gave them a rule for community living inspired by the rule of Theodore the Studite. This was the beginning of cenobitic life on the Holy Mountain, which had formerly been the domain of eremitic life and hesychasm. The inauguration of the Great Lavra provoked a collective conversion to the ideal of common living, and many monasteries were founded on Mt. Athos.

Athanasius was a man who had great compassion for the poor and those who suffered. Hagiographers emphasize the fact that he never gave up his regular shift of serving the ill, despite his weighty responsibilities as igumen of the Lavra. He is also remembered for the patience he showed in guiding the many spiritual children who depended on him.

Together with Peter the Athonite, Athanasius is the most important figure associated with the origin and flowering of monastic life on the peninsula of Mount Athos. As a result, he is naturally one of the saints most loved by Orthodox monks.

TRACCE DI LETTURA

Atanasio riteneva opportuno recarsi ogni giorno, dopo l'ultima lettura della sera, in una cappella laterale della chiesa, dedicata ai Quaranta martiri, perché i fratelli potessero venire a riferirgli le loro tentazioni, quelle subite nel corso della veglia, come quelle occorse loro nel sonno. L'uomo di Dio li rinforzava con la fede, colmandoli di fiducia e di pazienza, e trattando ciascuno con la medicina adatta ai problemi manifestatigli, come se ciascuno gli avesse mostrato, mediante l'apertura del cuore, la propria malattia spirituale. Li rimandava tutti gioiosi, rallegrati e incoraggiati nella loro lotta contro i demoni. Era per lui un dovere inderogabile quello di recarsi ogni giorno nella cappella dei Quaranta martiri per consolare e incoraggiare i fratelli nella loro lotta spirituale (Vita di sant'Atanasio l'Athonita 26).

PREGHIERA

Le schiere celesti
si sono meravigliate della tua vita nella carne:
tu sei andato con un corpo mortale
incontro a lotte invisibili,
o padre degno di ogni elogio,
e hai coperto di sconfitte la falange dei demoni.
Per questo, o Atanasio,
Cristo ti ha ricompensato con i suoi doni preziosi.
Intercedi, o padre,
presto Cristo nostro Dio
perché salvi le nostre anime.

Yitzhak Wittenberg (1907-1943) Jewish martyr

Yitzhak Wittenberg, the head of the Jewish secret organization of the ghetto of Vilnius, Lithuania, was arrested in 1943. Several underground fighters succeeded in freeing him by attacking the Nazis, who retaliated by threatening to destroy the entire ghetto unless Wittenberg were handed over to them. Wittenberg decided to hand himself over in order to save the Jewish population of Vilnius. He was tortured and killed by the Gestapo.

A READING

*With them I have departed -
with my brothers,
with the humiliated,
with the downtrodden,
with those marred by Satan,
with the last among men,
servants of God,
announcers of the Messiah,
with those who left in joy
and have no longing to return,
I have departed*

(Isaac Ogen, The Bridge over the Night)

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Antony Mary Zaccaria (d. 1539), priest (Roman and Ambrosian calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (28 ba'unah/sane):

Theodosius I (d. ca. 566), 33rd patriarch of Alexandria (Coptic Orthodox Church)

Panthenus (2nd-3th cent.), doctor of the school of Alexandria (Coptic Catholic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Johann Andreas Rothe (d. 1758), poet in Saxony

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Athanasius the Athonite, igumen; *Lampados the Thaumaturge* (10th cent.), monk

Martha (d. 551), mother of Simeon the Stylite the Young (Melkite Church)