

Sermon for Sunday after the Cross – 2015-09-20

Sts. Eustathios, Theopiste, Agapios & Theopistos
Fr. Demetri Tsigas, St. Katherine, Melbourne, FL

In the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today our church commemorates the Sunday after the Cross. In the Gospel reading we hear Jesus say, *“If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross and follow me.”* These are not words any of us really wants to hear. What we really want to hear is that if we follow Jesus, the rest of our life on earth will be a fairy tale and we’ll live happily ever after. That may be what Joel Osteen and some others are preaching but it is not what Jesus taught. Life will continue to be hard and sometimes even harder after we commit to making God Lord of our life.

I passed out in and with your Sunday Bulletin today, the story of the life of St. Eustathios, his wife, Theopiste, and sons, Agapios and Theopistos. It is a sad and tragic story with a happy-ish ending. In 1969, the Roman Catholic Church decided that it WAS a fairy tale and tossed it out. The Orthodox Church has NOT tossed it out. It IS ultimately a fairy tale story, as is the story of every true Christian who follows Jesus Christ, if not perhaps in this life, then certainly in the next life, where we indeed DO get to live happily ever after in God’s Kingdom, forever and ever with no end.

To God be the Glory, now and forever, and to the ages of ages, Amen.

Further Comments

St. Eustathios is known as St. Eustace in the west. He is known as the patron saint of hunters, firefighters and all who face adversity. If you know your liquors, you may recognize the symbol of the deer with the cross between its antlers on a bottle of [Jägermeister](#). This is related of course to the story of St. Eustace coming to know the Lord and being the patron saint of hunters.

Jägermeisters were senior foresters and gamekeepers in the German civil service until 1934, prior to the drink's introduction in 1935. This liquor is a digestif, an after dinner drink with a blend of 56 herbs and spices...and 35% alcohol.

The island of [Sint Eustatius](#) in the [Caribbean Netherlands](#) is also named after him. Though tiny, it played a critical role in the American Revolution. Nearly half of all American Revolutionary military supplies were obtained through St. Eustatius. The island sold [arms](#) and [ammunition](#) to anyone willing to pay. It was one of the few places from which the young [United States](#) could obtain military stores. The good relationship between St. Eustatius and the United States resulted in the noted "**First Salute**", the first international recognition of the American Colonies status as a nation by another nation.

On November 16, 1776, Captain Isaiah Robinson of the 14-gun American brig *Andrew Doria*, sailed into the anchorage below St. Eustatius' Fort Oranje. Robinson announced his arrival by firing a thirteen gun salute, one gun for each of the thirteen American colonies in rebellion against Britain. Governor [Johannes de Graaff](#) replied with an eleven gun salute from the cannons of Fort Oranje. International protocol required a two gun less acknowledgement of a sovereign flag. The *Andrew*

Doria flew the **Continental Colors** of the fledgling United States. It was the first international acknowledgment of American independence. The *Andrew Doria* had arrived to purchase munitions for the American Revolutionary forces. She was also carrying a copy of the Declaration of Independence which was presented to Governor De Graaff. An earlier copy had been captured on the way to Holland by the British. It was wrapped in documents that the British believed to be a strange cipher. In reality the documents were written in Yiddish, to Jewish merchants in Holland.

U.S. President **Franklin Delano Roosevelt** came to St. Eustatius in 1939 to recognize the importance of the 1776 "First Salute". He presented a large brass plaque to St. Eustatius which is displayed today under a flagpole atop the walls of Fort Oranje. The plaque reads:

"In commemoration to the salute to the flag of the United States, Fired in this fort November 16. 1776, By order of Johannes de Graaff, Governor of Saint Eustatius, In reply to a National Gun-Salute, Fired by the United States Brig of War Andrew Doria, Under Captain Isaiah Robinson of the Continental Navy, Here the sovereignty of the United States of America was first formally acknowledged to a national vessel by a foreign official. Presented by Franklin Delano Roosevelt, President of the United States of America" (The island's airport is now named after FDR.)

The **British** took the incident seriously. Britain protested bitterly against the continuous trade between the United Colonies and St. Eustatius. In 1778, **Lord Stormont** claimed in **Parliament** that, "if Sint Eustatius had sunk into the sea three years before, the **United Kingdom** would already have dealt with **George Washington**". Nearly half of all American Revolutionary military supplies were obtained through St. Eustatius. Nearly all American communications to Europe first passed through the island. The trade between St. Eustatius and the United States was the main reason for the **Fourth Anglo-Dutch War** (1780-1784). The war was disastrous for the Dutch economy.

Britain declared war on Holland, December 20, 1780. Even before officially declaring war, Britain had outfitted a massive battle fleet to take and destroy the weapons depot and vital commercial center that St. Eustatius had become. British Admiral **George Brydges Rodney** was appointed the commander of the battle fleet. February 3, 1781, the massive fleet of 15 ships of the line and numerous smaller ships transporting over 3,000 soldiers appeared before St. Eustatius prepared to invade. Governor De Graaff did not know about the **declaration of war**. Rodney offered De Graaff a bloodless surrender to his superior force. Rodney had over 1,000 cannons to De Graaff's dozen cannons and a garrison of sixty men. De Graaff surrendered the island, but first he fired two rounds as a show of resistance for the honor of Dutch Admiral **Lodewijk van Bylandt**, who commanded a ship of the Dutch Navy which was in the harbor.^[4] Ten months later, the island was conquered by the **French**, allies of the **Dutch** in the war. The Dutch regained control over the devastated island in 1784.

British Admiral **George Brydges Rodney** was so focused on capturing (stealing) as much treasure as possible from the island and the islands around it that he delayed sending his fleet to assist the British fleet in the Battle of the Capes and to resupply General Cornwallis. This led directly to the British defeat and the American victory in the War for Independence!

Not bad for a saint most of you never heard of before and that the Roman Catholic Church considers a fairy tale.

Greatmartyr Eustathios Placidas with his wife, Theopiste and children, Agapios & Theopistos of Rome - September 20

The Holy Great Martyr Eustathios was named Placidas before baptism. He was a military commander under the emperors Titus (79-81) and Trajan (98-117). Even before he came to know Christ, Placidas did acts of charity, helping the poor and destitute. And the Lord deigned not to leave the virtuous pagan remain within the darkness of idol-worship.

Once while hunting in a forest, he saw a stag which, while fleeing, would stop now and then to look him right in the eye. Placidas pursued it on horseback, but could not catch up. The stag leaped over a chasm and stood on the other side facing the saint. Placidas suddenly saw a radiant cross between its antlers. In surprise Placidas heard a voice coming from the Cross saying: *"Why do you pursue Me, Placidas?"* *"Who are You, Master?"* asked Placidas. In reply he heard: *"I am Jesus Christ, Whom you do not know, yet you honor Me by your good deeds. I have appeared here on this creature for your sake, to capture you in the net of My love for mankind. It is not fitting that one as righteous as you should worship idols and not know the truth. It was to save mankind that I came into the world."* Placidas cried out: *"Lord, I believe that You are the God of Heaven and earth, the Creator of all things. Master, teach me what I should do."* And again the divine voice spoke: *"Go to the bishop of your country and receive Baptism from him, and he will instruct you."*

With joy Placidas returned home and told everything to his wife Tatiana. She in turn told him how the evening before in a mysterious dream she had been told: *"Tomorrow you, your husband and your sons on the morrow shall come to Me and know that I am the true God."* The spouses then proceeded to do as they had been bidden. They hastened to the Christian bishop, who baptized all their family, and communed them with the Holy Mysteries. Placidas was renamed Eustathios, his wife was called Theopiste, and their young children, Agapios and Theopistos.

On the following day, St. Eustathios set out to the place of his miraculous conversion and in fervent prayer he offered up thanks to the Lord for having called him onto the path of salvation. Again St. Eustathios received a miraculous revelation. The Lord Himself foretold his impending tribulations: *"Eustathios, you shall suffer many misfortunes, as did Job, but in the end you will conquer the devil."*

Soon St. Eustathios was plunged into misfortune: all his servants died of the plague and his cattle perished. Brought to ruin, but not despairing in spirit, St. Eustathios and his family secretly abandoned their home, to live unknown, humble and in poverty. They went to Egypt to board a ship sailing for Jerusalem. During the voyage a new woe beset the saint. The ship owner, enchanted by the beauty of Theopiste, cruelly set Eustathios and his children ashore, keeping the wife for himself. In great sorrow the saint continued on his way, and new woe beset him. Coming to a tempestuous river, he went to carry his two sons across in turn. When he had brought one across, the other was seized by a lion and carried off into the wilderness. As he turned back towards the other, a wolf dragged that child into the forest.

Having lost everything, St. Eustathios wept bitterly. But he realized that Divine Providence had sent him these misfortunes to test his endurance and devotion to God. In his inconsolable grief, St. Eustathios went on farther, prepared for new tribulations. In the village of Badessos he found work and spent five years in unremitting toil. St. Eustathios did not know then that through the mercy of God, shepherds and farmers had saved his sons, and they lived right near him. He also did not know that the impudent shipowner had been struck down with a terrible disease and died, leaving St. Theopiste untouched. She lived at the place where the ship landed in peace and freedom.

During this time it had become difficult for the emperor Trajan to raise an army for Rome to deal with a rebellion, for the soldiers would not go into battle without their commander Placidus. They advised Trajan to send men out to all the cities to look for him. Antiochus and Acacius, friends of Placidus, sought him in various places. Finally, they arrived in the village where St. Eustathios lived. The soldiers found Eustathios, but they did not recognize him and they began to tell him of the one whom they sought, asking his help and promising a large reward. St. Eustathios, immediately recognized his friends, but did not reveal to them his identity.

He borrowed money from one of his friends and fed the visitors. As they looked at him, the travelers noted that he resembled their former commander. When they saw a scar on his shoulder from a deep sword-wound, they realized that it was their friend there before them. They embraced him with tears and told him why they were seeking him. St. Eustathios returned to Rome with them and again became a general. Many new recruits were drafted into the army from all over the empire. He did not know that two young soldiers who served him, and whom he loved for their skill and daring, were actually his own sons. They did not know that they were serving under the command of their own father, nor that they were brothers by birth.

While on campaign, the army led by Eustathios halted at a certain settlement. The soldier-brothers were talking in their tent. The elder one spoke about his life, how he had lost his mother and brother, and how in a terrifying way he had been parted from his father. The younger brother then realized that before him was his very own brother, and told him how he had been rescued from the wolf. A woman overheard the soldiers' conversation, since their tent was pitched right next to her house, and this woman realized that these were her sons. Still not identifying herself to them, but not wanting to be separated from them, she went to their commander, St. Eustathios, to ask him to take her to Rome with him. She said she had been a prisoner, and wanted to go home. Then she came to recognize the commander as her husband, and with tears she told him about herself and about the two soldiers who were actually their sons. Thus, through the great mercy of the Lord, the whole family was happily reunited.

Soon thereafter the rebellion was crushed, and St. Eustathios returned to Rome with honor and glory. The emperor Trajan had since died, and his successor Hadrian (117-138) wanted to celebrate the event of victory with a solemn offering of sacrifice to the gods. To the astonishment of everyone, St. Eustathios did not show up at the pagan temple. By order of the emperor they searched frantically for him. *"Why don't you want to worship the gods?"* inquired the emperor. *"You, above all others, ought to offer thanks to them. They not only preserved you in war and granted you victory, but also they helped you find your wife and children."* St. Eustathios replied: *"I am a Christian and I glorify and give thanks to Him, and I offer sacrifice to Him. I owe my life to Him. I do not know or believe in any other god than Him."* In a rage, the emperor ordered him to take off his military belt and brought him and his family before him. They did not succeed in persuading the steadfast confessors of Christ to offer sacrifice to idols. The whole family of St. Eustathios was sentenced to be torn apart by wild beasts, but the beasts would not touch the holy martyrs.

Then the cruel emperor gave orders to throw them all alive into a red-hot brass bull, and St. Eustathios, his wife Theopiste, and their sons Agapios and Theopistos endured a martyr's death. Before being placed in the bull, St. Eustathios prayed, *"Grant, O Lord, Thy grace to our relics, and let him who calls upon us have a place in Thy Kingdom. Though he call upon us on a river or on the sea, when he is in danger, we entreat Thee to come to his aid."* Three days later, they opened the brass bull, and the bodies of the holy martyrs were found unscathed. Not one hair on their heads was singed, and their faces shone with an unearthly beauty. Many seeing this miracle came to believe in Christ. Christians then buried the bodies of the saints.