

# Once Upon a SAINT

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A little friend came to honor Chrysostom during the photo shoot. See if you can spot him!

My Dearest Children,

In Antioch (which is now in Turkey), in the year 347 AD, a young woman named Anthusa gave birth to a small boy named John. His father was a high ranking military officer and a Christian, and he died soon after John's birth.

"Lord," Anthusa prayed, "I no longer have my dear Secundus to be father to our son. Every child needs a father, so You will have to be Father to baby John, not just as his Creator, but in every way and

moment. Without Your help, I can do nothing."

Through her prayers, Anthusa felt God's blessing upon her and John. Since Secundus left them a great deal of money, she gave John a wonderful education with learned men of both pagan and Christian background.

John enjoyed school, but he also liked theater, music, fishing, and other normal and fun things. He thought he was too worldly, because his best friend, Basil, wanted to pray, fast, and sacrifice all the time and didn't care about music and fishing. John wasn't very strong, and though he tried to do big sacrifices like Basil (such as not eating for a long time), it was his smaller sacrifices that were successful. For instance, he walked to school instead of riding his horse. He offered up difficult moments, instead of complaining about them. He helped his mother around the house without her asking.

John grew up to be an intelligent, prayerful, and somewhat delicate young man. John's mother died, and it was rumored that the Patriarch wanted to ordain John and Basil. In those days, priests were chosen from among the people.

"Basil," John said to his best friend, "I am giving away my inheritance, and I'm going to be a hermit. The Patriarch can't make me a priest if he can't find me."

"In that case, I'll go with you," Basil replied. "We can be hermits together."

"Well, alright," John replied. "I guess you can come..." but inside, John felt sad, because he thought Basil would be a very good priest.

Basil continued: "And if the Patriarch catches us, we can still be priests together."

John nodded, but he didn't think he would be a good priest himself since he was often sick, big sacrifices weren't easy for him, and he still liked theater and music.

John and Basil were hermits for almost two years, living in complete silence. But then they were found out. Basil was caught by the Patriarch's men, but John escaped, running and laughing to himself, relieved that Basil would have to become a priest after all. Basil was going to be such a wonderful Father!

After Fr. Basil was ordained, he went back to John, quite annoyed: "How could you run away, John? I thought that if they caught us, we'd be priests together. We are brothers in spirit, you and I. And you ran away!"

John laughed, "Ah well, you make a much better priest."

Fr. Basil was irritated. "You would be a good priest too! You think too much about being weak. But God loves to work great things through weakness. It's the strong people that struggle with letting God do His work the way He wants. We're too used to trying to control things. Come to the Patriarch, John. You've hidden long enough. I think it's God's will for you to be a priest."

John went with Fr. Basil to the Patriarch. When the Patriarch laid his hands on John, a shining white dove appeared above his head. The Holy Spirit descends on every newly ordained priest, but the sign of the Holy Spirit happened to be visible for the newly ordained Father John.

Why was this sign visible? Because the gifts of the Holy Spirit would be especially visible in Fr. John. In particular, Fr. John was given the ability to preach inspiring and enlightening sermons on the Bible and Truth. Who would've thought that the man who lived as a silent hermit would now be called "Chrysostom," which means "Golden Tongued," in honor of his beautiful words?! Chrysostom is often shown with a bee or beehive in iconography, as a symbol of the golden honey or words that came from his mouth. Not long after, he became the Patriarch of Constantinople after the old Patriarch died.

"The bee is more honored than other animals, not because she labors, but because she labors for others." Chrysostom told his people.

Fr. Basil was right: Patriarch John Chrysostom did make an excellent priest, not because he made big impossible sacrifices, but because he joyfully offered every small thing he was and had for his people. Like the bee in his sermon, Chrysostom labored for others with a cheerful soul.

Under his care, Chrysostom's Patriarchate fed and clothed more than 3000 widows daily, and orphans and the sick were cared for in addition. He studied and preached, he wrote the version of the Divine Liturgy as we use it today, and he added music and antiphons (so you see, Chrysostom's love of music really had a great spiritual value!). By this point, Chrysostom figured out that certain foods made him sick, so he became a perpetual faster from many foods. He usually refused to be a guest for dinner because he didn't want to embarrass hosts by not eating the food they offered.

But he always kept fasting in perspective: "The value of fasting consists not in abstinence from food," wrote Chrysostom, "but in withdrawing from sinful practices."

Chrysostom was exiled for being a staunch defender of the Truth. While in exile, he continued to write to his people and serve as he could, whether it was giving away food or comforting those in prison. Chrysostom was sick and dying, and suffering terribly. He received the Holy Mysteries, and was finally able to rest his weary body, exclaiming as he died: "Glory to God for all things!" It was September 14th, 407 AD.

Sometimes God allows part or all of a saint to be incorrupt from death, so as to show us something about the saint. In St. John Chrysostom's case, his right hand has been preserved from decay. This is to show his position of great authority, and to remind us about all that his hand wrote for us! St. John Chrysostom's left ear is also incorrupt. St. Paul the apostle appeared to him and whispered in Chrysostom's ear how to interpret Paul's letters. Both relics are venerated on Mount Athos.

The main feast of St. John Chrysostom is celebrated on November 13th. How nice to have Chrysostom's feast right before the Christmas Fast to remind us that all our fasting and offerings, no matter how small, should have one aim: to prepare our hearts for the coming of Christ! Let us be like little bees, laboring and fasting for others.