



■ On the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross (September 14)

Blessed Theodore the Fool-for-Christ from Georgia*

IN A CERTAIN village in Iberia (present-day Eastern Georgia), there lived a simple man by the name of Theodore, whom everyone considered to be a fool, if not insane. He never went to Church, though he did not appear to have any other failings.

Once, on the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious Cross, during which multitudes of believers assemble in Churches to venerate the All-Venerable Wood, Theodore thought to himself: “Today I will go to Church to see, at least once in my life, what they do there.”

So he went. He venerated the Cross with the other faithful, attended the Divine Liturgy, and was especially moved by the words of the Gospel: “*Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.*”

After the dismissal, he visited an acquaintance of his and asked him the meaning of these words. In jest, the other answered: “That means that you should go to the forest, cut down a tree, make a Cross, bear it, and walk towards the Kingdom of God.”

Theodore indeed went to the forest and made a large Cross, which was so heavy that only with great difficulty could he carry it. He thus started to walk, asking every passer-by: “Is this the road that leads to the Kingdom of God?”

Such a question led everyone to believe that they were dealing with a crazy person, and they would answer: “Walk faster! This road goes straight to the Kingdom of God.”

So Theodore made greater haste....

He wandered for many days, forgetting to eat and drink. Finally, he reached the border between Iberia and Turkey. At this point, he caught sight of a monastery in the distance and joyfully said to himself: "Thank God! That must be the Kingdom of God!"

When he arrived at the monastery and asked his usual question, they realized his simplicity and answered: "The Kingdom of God is not yet here; but it is close, very close. Rest yourself for a while and perhaps some other travelers will come to accompany you; for the final stretch of the road to the Kingdom of God is very dangerous."

The simple-minded Theodore accepted their offer and settled in the Narthex of the monastery Church, where he deposited his Cross, so as never to be separated from it.

The Abbot, who had perceived his love and simplicity, charged him with the care of the garden. Theodore accomplished his duty with great zeal and reverence.

One day, while looking at our Crucified Lord, he asked the Abbot with great contrition of heart: "Father, who is that bearing his Cross as I do? Why is he nailed to his Cross?"

The Abbot answered: "That is our Lord Jesus Christ"; and he recounted the life of our Lord to him. Henceforth, Theodore felt fraternal love for Christ on account of the similarity of their lives, and he spoke to Him with familiarity.

One day, when they had brought him food, the blessed one thought: "Did my Brother Christ eat, just as I do, while walking on earth? I will ask Him to share my meager dinner, if He wishes."

As he was thinking these things, the door suddenly opened and a radiant light filled the Church. The Icon of the Crucified Lord came to life and our Lord Jesus Christ appeared, full of glory and beauty!

Christ addressed Theodore with the following words: "I drank and ate while on earth, and now have no need of food. Soon, the same will come to pass with you. I am the Son of a rich Father. I will quickly go to Him and will take you with Me. I will show you His Glory and you will be with Me there eternally!"

In the meantime, at the sudden illumination of the Church, the Abbot and the Brotherhood ran in its direction. They thought that the fool, Theodore, had set it on fire. When they reached the Church, they saw the wondrous light and heard the quiet and sweet

conversation between the unknown man and Theodore. The blessed one avoided answering their questions as to what had taken place by feigning ignorance.

At last, Theodore told the Abbot of the revelation. The Abbot, in great astonishment, fell at the feet of the blessed one, beseeching him: “Truly you are a brother of Christ. O man of God, intercede that He might take me with you to the House of His Father!”

That night, with his customary simplicity and boldness, Theodore prayed for the Abbot. Christ then appeared to him again and said: “The Abbot must continue to labor there.”

When the Abbot learned what our Lord had said, he begged Theodore with tears: “Pray to Christ, Who was crucified for us, to have mercy on me for the sake of His Most Holy Mother, though I am unworthy of the House of His Father.”

The blessed one prayed again to our Lord Jesus Christ, Who answered: “For My Mother’s sake, in forty days I will take your Abbot with you to the House of My Father.”

Following this, the Abbot and Theodore spent their days in prayer. When the forty days were up, they both reposed in peace while in a position of prayer!



* A summary of the narrative in the periodical *Nikodemos*, No. 3 (May-June 1976).