

There Are Many Kinds of Prisons

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



On November 25th we remember Saint Clement of Rome. He was a contemporary of the apostles and one of Rome's earliest bishops.

Born into a wealthy and well-known Roman family, Clement was highly educated and raised in luxury. But he lost his family when his mother and brothers were caught in a roaring gale at sea and were flung by the storm to different places. His grieving father went off to look for his wife and sons, and somehow also was lost.

Clement wanted desperately to find his family, and decided to travel east in his search. He went to Alexandria, where he met the apostle Barnabas. Later, in Palestine, he was introduced to the apostle Peter, and the two men struck up a friendship. After many spiritual conversations, Clement agreed to be baptized by Peter, and became his follower. In the next years he accompanied the great apostle on his travels, helping in his efforts to bring people to Christ, and enduring with him his sufferings and imprisonments.

As they traveled, Clement and Peter shared an extraordinary personal experience. They found Clement's mother, reduced to begging in an obscure town. Later they found his father. Reunion with his parents was like a release from prison for Clement, freeing him from the worry of not knowing what had happened to them.

Peter knew that enemies of Christ were determined to kill him. He wanted to leave the Church, and Rome, in good hands. He and the other apostles made Clement a bishop. After Peter's death as a martyr, two men served briefly as Bishop of Rome, and then came Clement's tenure. He served brilliantly, convincing unbelievers to follow Christ and fearlessly proclaiming the faith. As bishop, he urged his flock in a letter to be willingly "imprisoned" or "bound" for Christ: "Let the one truly possessed by the love of Christ keep His commandments. What can express the binding power of divine love?"

The emperor Trajan exiled Clement to Cherson, a place in the Crimea. There he met several thousand prisoners for the faith, Christians who had also been exiled and put to the arduous work of stonecutting at a quarry in the hot, dry land where water was scarce. They welcomed Clement and took strength from his encouragement and unshakable faith. So strong were his prayers that God revealed a hidden spring from which they could all take physical refreshment as well.

Once again, Clement brought unbelievers to the faith—pagans who lived in the area. The stonecutting work led to the building of a church right in the quarry, and more were built in the following years.

Clement was put to death by drowning in the year 101. It would be centuries before his relics were rescued from the sea, but their wonderworking power has healed and saved many other prisoners of unbelief and despair, leading them to certainty that the Kingdom is the place where all those in prison will be set free.

Troparion - Tone 4

O God of our Fathers,
always act with kindness towards us;
take not Your mercy from us,
but guide our lives in peace
through the prayers of the hierarchs Clement and Peter