

## St Anastasia the Roman (Saint Symeon the Translator)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



**We find two Anastasias in the *Lives* of the saints, both of whom were of prominent and famous families and who confessed their faith. Both were daughters of mighty Rome.**

The first was married against her will by her parents, but never came together with her husband, nor even slept with him, pretending she was ill, though in reality because he was a pagan. She was thus able to preserve her virginity, because, a few days later, her husband died. She therefore lived the whole of her life in asceticism, prudently and with all the virtues, giving all her property as alms to the poor. She visited the holy martyrs in their places of confinement, urged them to bear their torments for the sake of the Lord, counselled them and helped them with their material needs.

When the tyrants murdered them, she stole their holy relics and buried them with devotion and love. While she was about her daily tasks, the impious learned of her, and she was martyred by fire, rising to the Lord as a fragrant scent. We keep her memory on December 22.

The second Saint Anastasia never married at all and loved the hurly-burly of the world not at all. She longed for Christ from her childhood, took up His beneficial and most sweet yoke, and bore His light burden, that is she remained alone. Later, she was martyred, having suffered many dire torments with great boldness and courage, for the sake of the heavenly Bridegroom. This is why she was greatly glorified by Him with a triple crown: for her virginity, her asceticism and her martyrdom, as we shall narrate in detail.

This praiseworthy maiden, who bore the name of the Resurrection of Christ our God and Saviour [“anastasis” is Greek for “resurrection”], rejected her father, mother and kin, despised wealth, and abandoned all things fleeting and subject to decay in order to enjoy what is permanent and eternal. At the age of twenty, she entered a monastery and was tonsured by a virtuous and well-educated nun by the name of

Sophia, who taught her and gave her detailed advice about the monastic state. Anastasia was now fully-equipped for this life, made continuous progress- through the admonitions of her teacher- and exhibited great virtue. Sophia, who saw her spiritual child prospering in divine love, glorified the Lord.

Our common enemy, however, envied the boldness of the maiden and sent a fierce and harsh war against her body, in order, insofar as was possible, to make her hate the monastic state, or, at least, to become careless in her asceticism. But the saint did not relax her efforts at all in her spiritual struggle and actually tried harder. The more she saw of the treacherous enemy, the more bravely she fought against him. In this way she was victorious and put the tempter entirely to shame.

When he saw that there was no way by which he could defeat her, the miserable wretch resorted to another ploy. He revealed her to his servants and to the workers of impiety, who were at that time extremely eager to torture Christians in a variety of horrible ways. The impious Diocletian was reigning at the time [This Saint Anastasia should not be confused with the Saint Anastasia who was martyred under Decius and whose memory we keep on 12 October].

So these minions hastened to the governor, Probus, and told him that Anastasia did not venerate their gods, nor did she respect the emperors, but rather proclaimed that Christ is the true God and the Creator of the whole universe. Probus then assembled a large number of people in the theatre and ordered his servants to bring the blessed maiden before him. These hirelings, who could not now be reined in, immediately ran and broke down the gates of the monastery. They forced their way in without a shred of decency and demanded to know the whereabouts of a certain Anastasia.

They brought her before Probus who asked her name. She replied: "My name is Anastasia ["of the resurrection"], because the Lord resurrected me, so that I could shame you today, and your father the Devil.

When Probus heard this abrupt answer, he wished to soften her severity and rigidity with compliments. But the blockhead had no idea that the faith was in her soul was stronger than a diamond. So he said to her: "Listen to me, maiden, and I'll advise you where your best interests lie. Sacrifice to the great gods, and I'll marry you to a very rich and prominent citizen. I'll give you lots of gold and silver, the finest clothes, as many slaves and servants as you want and, at a stroke, you'll become a renowned gentlewoman. Know what's best for you; think about what's befitting to your beauty and nobility of soul.

Don't try my temper or you'll find out how bad your impiety really is. The gods know well that I'm sorry that your beauty should come to this, and that, like a father, I'm looking after your interests, I'm telling you what's best for you. But if you don't listen, of necessity you'll feel my brutality and anger, just as now you've seen my docility and favour. It'll be too late to repent then".

The martyr replied: "Milord, for me life and riches and bridegroom are my sweet Lord Jesus Christ. My death for His sake is worth more than this life. It was for His sake that I scorned the pleasant and enjoyable things of the world. Gold, silver, precious stones, and everything that lovers of the flesh value, I regard as dust. Fire, the sword, the spear, dismemberment, wounds, scourging, and anything else you would consider a punishment are for me pleasure and enjoyment, since I behold Christ, my Lord and Saviour. Not only do I desire to suffer such tribulations for His love, but I'd die a thousand deaths for His sake. So don't pretend that you supposedly feel sorry for my beauty which is withering like the flower of the field, but do rather what is in your power to do. Stop wasting your time. I will never worship gods of stone or wood".

When the governor heard all this, his anger flared. He first ordered them to beat her mercilessly about the face. Then she was stripped, so that everyone present in the theatre would see her shamed.

"For your pride", said the governor, "you deserve to be reduced to this state in the eyes of so many men. But even now, come and enjoy the good will of the gods. You don't want such beauty to wither before its time, and for yourself to become a wretched loss. Believe me, unless you do as I say, there's no way out of my hands. I'll have you cut into little pieces and fed to wild animals".



“Milord”, she replied, “this disrobing isn’t shameful at all for me, because it’s a brilliant, most fitting adornment. I’ve been stripped of the old person and have donned the new, in righteousness and truth. I’m now ready to suffer this death you hope to terrify me with. I want it so much. Even if you cut up my members, rip out my tongue, my nails and my teeth, you’ll be granting me an even greater blessing. I devote my whole being to my Creator and Saviour. I desire that He be glorified in all my members. I’ll present them to him as jewels, with the adornment of faith.

Anastasia continued in the same vein, much to the annoyance of the judge, so that he would not feel sorry for her, would not let her go without punishment and thus deprive her of the crowns she had striven for. The governor and all those assembled in the theatre were astonished at the maiden’s liberty of speech, so he decided to put flattery aside and begin the punishments and tortures.

He ordered that four posts be driven into the ground, on which they stretched out the martyr and tied her, face-down. Underneath, they lit a fire with oil, pitch and brimstone, as well as other inflammable materials, by which her breast, stomach and internal organs were burned. From above, the heartless creatures beat her back with sticks. She suffered and was thus tortured for a good long time and her spine and all her back were cut to pieces from the beating. On her front, the flesh, the veins and her blood were all thoroughly burned and she underwent such pain and agony that it was frightening to hear her. Only with her prayers, which were like dew, was she able to moderate the fierceness of the heat, because she remembered God's former miracles, such as the Babylonian furnace.

When the brutal and inhuman beast saw that the martyr was not cowed by these tortures, he ordered her to be tied to a wheel. No sooner said than done, and, when the wheel was turned by some mechanical device, all the saint's bones were shattered, her tendons and joints stretched, her body was pulled out of its natural, harmonious shape and she became a pitiful sight.

But still the martyr prayed for deliverance. This so enraged the governor that he jumped up from his throne several times, at a loss what to do. The Devil urged him to cut off the saint's breasts, which was the most terrible and agonizing punishment because that is where the heart is located. But the martyr had greater passion in her heart for the love of Christ, and was thus able to scorn the lesser pain.

When the tyrant saw that the saint was able to withstand this dreadful torture, he determined to defeat her immense resilience with condign tortures. So he had all her teeth and nails pulled out. Again, the saint thanked the Lord that she had become a sharer and participant in His sufferings. At the same time, she cursed the tyrant's gods, calling them forces of darkness, demons and perdition for the soul.

The judge could not bear to hear such words and, because the light was so hateful to his feeble eyes, he ordered that her tongue be torn out from the root. Yet again, the Saint was not cowed by this punishment; she merely asked for a little time in which to glorify the Lord with her organs of speech. Having finished her prayer, she told the executioner to set about his work, which he did, cutting off her tongue. She fainted from the pain and a Christian called Kyrillos gave her a little water to drink. When Probus heard this, he was so enraged that he ordered both their heads to be cut off.

The saint's relics remained for some days abandoned on the ground, untouched by

bird or beast, until they were restored to her teacher, Sophia. The latter had prayed unceasingly, from the time Saint Anastasia had been seized, begging the Lord to give her charge strength to the end to withstand the flattery, to be brave in the face of the tortures and to be rewarded with crowns.

Once Sophia had found the relics, she had them transferred into the city of Rome, where they were placed in an honourable tomb, to the glory of God the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is due all honour and dominion and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

*Source: St Anastasia the Roman, ed. of Holy Monastery of St Gregorius, Holy Mount Athos, 1998*

In the last week we have commemorated several martyrs: Saint James the Brother of our Lord (60 AD), Saint Dimitrios and Saint Nestor (305) and now Saint Anastasia (256). They should stand as a reminder to us that, whatever, the achievements of Late Antiquity- and they were considerable- life then was very different from what it has been since Christianity was adopted as the official religion of the Roman Empire. Then, there was clearly no religious tolerance for those who set themselves apart from the mainstream. Saint James (along with Saint John the Baptist, the Lord Himself, and many of the Apostles) were put to death for defying either the Jewish or the Roman religions. Moreover, trials were often conducted in the most brutal fashion, with torture a common expedient to achieve the required verdict. On occasion, plays were staged in theatres in which one of the actors was required to be beheaded, and it was not unheard of for “criminals” to be sacrificed for this purpose. With Christianity, theatres were closed and the games discontinued. Gradually, greater respect for the human person became established, with the concept of a “fair trial” and certain inalienable rights. The famous sentence from the Preamble to the American Declaration of Independence (*We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*) would be unthinkable in a non-Christian context, or, at least, one that has not been influenced by Christianity. Of course, there have been lamentable lapses: the Spanish Inquisition, the Puritan witch hunts, the sectarian strife in Northern Ireland and many others. But these have been exceptions to the Christian ethos rather than part of it. If we need reminding of this, we should look at other, non-Christian, parts of the world today and we will see that brutal punishments continue to be applied and that many people, especially women, are considered no more important than chattels. Even at their worst, states where Christianity has flourished have usually been better places for most people to live

in than those from which it has been absent.

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