



**“Martha, Martha,
you are worried and distracted by many things;
there is need of only one thing...”** (Lk 10:41)

Divine Liturgy
 Sunday at 11:30 am
 Our Lady of Victory
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First Reading: 1Thessalonians 2:1-13

You yourselves know that our coming to you was not in vain, but though we had already suffered and been shamefully mistreated at Philippi, as you know, we had courage in our God to declare to you the gospel of God in spite of great opposition. For our appeal does not spring from deceit or impure motives or trickery, but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts. As you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed; nor did we seek praise from mortals, whether from you or from others, though we might have made demands as apostles of Christ. But we were gentle among you, like a nurse tenderly caring for her own children. So deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you have become very dear to us. You remember our labor and toil, brothers and sisters; we worked night and day, so that we might not burden any of you while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how pure, upright, and blameless our conduct was toward you believers. As you know, we dealt with each one of you like a father with his children, urging and encouraging you and pleading that you lead a life worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. We also constantly give thanks to God for this, that when you received the word of God that you heard from us, you accepted it not as a human word but as what it really is, God's word, which is also at work in you believers.

The Gospel: Luke 10:38-42

As they went on their way, Jesus entered a certain village, where a woman named Martha welcomed him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what he was saying. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks; so she came to him and asked, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me." But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her."

St Simon the Stylite (c. 390-459) - Feast day: 1 September



St Simon is a Syrian Christian hermit who was the first known and most famous stylite, or pillar hermit (from Greek *stylos*, “pillar”).

Simeon was born around 390 A.D. at Sisan, a northern Syrian village. Young Simeon's devotion became inflamed after hearing a sermon on the Beatitudes as an early teenager—a discourse that inspired the youth to become “pure in heart” himself. Not long after (when he was around 16 years of age), he abandoned the tending of his father's flocks in order to enter a monastery.

There he lived for 10 years, engaging in ascetic practices such as abstaining from all food during the 40 days of Lent. Eventually, his fervor and asceticism caused such resentment among his fellow monks — who were unable to equal his zeal — that he was asked to leave the monastery.

Thereafter, Simeon became a wandering solitary hermit. His holiness attracted the attention both of disciples who sought to follow his spiritual path and of supplicants seeking his advice, intercession with God or miraculous assistance.

To escape the importunities of the people, he began his pillar life northwest of Aleppo about 420. Initially, he had a pillar erected about 6 feet high. Upon this perch he remained day and night, year around for four years. As the number of spectators grew, so did the distractions, but so also did his capacity to endure.

Over time, higher and higher pillars were erected. The second pillar was 20 feet high, the third was 33 feet, and the fourth, where he spent the last twenty years of his life, was 67 feet high. The platforms atop the pillars upon which St. Simeon the Stylite lived were circular and did not exceed six feet in diameter.

St Simeon's fame spread to the point that even Roman Emperors that lived in his lifetime all personally sought his counsel from below the pillar. For instance, the Emperor Theodosius and his wife Eudocia greatly respected the saint and listened to his counsels, and the Emperor Leo paid respectful attention to a letter that the saint dictated in favor of the Council of Chalcedon. He offered discourses and prayers that led to the conversion of countless visitors.

To understand Simeon's exploits, we must first understand that traditionally speaking, standing is the posture of prayer (typical of Eastern liturgies). Simeon was a true embodiment of the monastic ideal to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:16). His aim in climbing the pillar was not, therefore, to be a spectacle, but to set himself apart and to commit himself to prayer and to penance with his whole soul and body at all times.

Today, the magnificent ruins of the monastery of Qal'at Sim'an (“fortress of Simeon”), near Aleppo in Syria, stand as a striking reminder of the power of Simeon's sanctity.



The remains of Simeon’s pillar have been chiseled down to a stub about 8 feet high by the tens of thousands of pilgrims who visited the site after his death and carried off small pieces of the column as relics of the saint. The column is enclosed by a huge octagonal shrine, the dome that once covered it collapsed in an ancient earthquake.

The entire complex was surrounded by four basilica churches, a monastery, a cloister, a graveyard, a processional way and a huge baptistry.

Certainly, we recognize the strangeness of this form of mortification, and we struggle with so many questions about this lifestyle in our day and age.

Theodoret of Cyrrhus - a contemporary of St Simon - explains the need for Simeon’s pillar in this way: just as God communicated through strange signs manifested in his prophets (e.g. Hosea’s marriage to a prostitute, Ezekiel laying on his side for 40 days, etc.), so God also ordained Simeon’s pillar to be a sign, perhaps even a sign of contradiction.

If Simeon is a scandal to us, therefore, the true scandal maybe is that we do not believe in the power of prayer and devotion like Simeon did...

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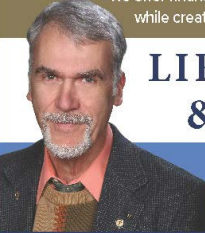
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