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FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 27, 2009

Holy Great Martyr James the Persian

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St. James (Jacob) the Persian (Feast Day - November 27)

James, the glorious Great Martyr of Christ, was from Persia. He lived during the years of the pious Kings Arcadius and Honorius, the sons of Theodosius the Great, who ruled in the year 395 A.D. He lived in Veethiavan of Persia, situated in the land of Elouzeesion. Then, Isdigerdis I and Bahram V, his son, ruled over the Persians. They were cruel and pitiless men. They forced the Christians (whomever they found) to worship, as they did, the senseless idols.

Now James was a lord of merit, notable and of good service to the nation. He was honored and beloved by all, as he was wealthy, knowledgeable and virtuous. Wherefore, he was considered first in the palace, and the king exceedingly loved him. He bestowed on him great importance and abundant gifts. So much did Isdigerdis and his son Bahram love James, that they did not wish to be separated even one hour from him. They displayed such favor, that they had him as a brother, for he was well-mannered and his family prominent. But this was so that they could cunningly lure him to impiety. For James was a Christian from childhood just as were his parents and wife, both pious and faithful to our Lord Jesus Christ. So, these villains tried hard to estrange him with gifts and gratuities. They chose to be good-natured and discreet, and to persuade him with benefits and flatteries, rather than with threats and torments. However, this marvelous James, who resisted at first, was defeated by the many generous favors of the ruler, and, alas!, he was captured. He denied the most sweet Christ and worshipped the demons, and became one in spirit with the king.

But do not frown; hearken and strengthen your heart, and attend to this. Because just as one drop of water drips continually onto the hard marble to perforate it, so also many gifts and favors are able to convert the gratified soul with ease and quickness; thus, did the ever-memorable one have the solid rock of his faith hollowed out. But listen to his end to receive exultation and joy, that God (Who foreknows and foresees) does not overlook but straightens the fallen and illuminates the way of the blind.

It was circulated around the land that James had denied Christ. This news came into the ears of his mother and spouse, who were wounded in their hearts upon hearing these unexpected words. Since they were not present to censure his tongue, they sent him a letter, saying thus:

"It was not proper to your nobility to exchange falsehood for the truth; to defraud the faith for the honor of men and temporary rewards, which pass by as a dream and disperse like smoke; and to love the perishable and temporary kingdom, and abandon immortality and eternity. For this violation you would elect to be cast into the inextinguishable fire and endless torment? You, who are unworthy of His love, denied Christ, in

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order to gain one worm-eaten man? O the mindlessness! What are you able to benefit by them, when you go together into torment? We have been greatly distressed by you and pour forth many tears and, with all our hearts, we pray to the true God not to desert you, as He is compassionate, but to receive your return. So recognize the mischief that you have created to become a son of darkness, instead of light, which you were formerly. Recover and revert again to godliness. And, if you do not repent speedily, know this: you no longer have any relation with us. But we wish to be as strangers and foreigners to you, and you will inherit nothing from us, so as to be completely separated from our society. Because not one particle has the light with the darkness, and the faithful with the faithless. So make a good return. Whereas, you departed badly; but the Master, Whom you denied, will receive you with open arms and rejoicing. If you disdain our advice and tears, when you reach the divine trial, you will be punished in torments endlessly and your crying will be in vain."



These things James read in the letter, and he remained in a stupor; indeed, as if from sleep and drunkenness, he was roused, realizing the treasure of faith of which he was destitute, and the evil of error into which he had tumbled. He cried bitterly and repented from his heart of the former things and beat his breast, lamenting and crying before the Master to forgive the iniquity, as He is compassionate. In imitation of Manasseh and Peter's repentance, he studied the Holy Scriptures and recalled the bitter punishments. He was not able to cease the tears, and it was evident he repented of his former impiety. Wherefore,

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certain idolators perceived and learned the reason for his disquiet. They betrayed him to the king. The king's heart was wounded on hearing such things. Infuriated, he summoned him for questioning and inquired if he were a Nazarene. James answered boldly and eagerly:

"Yes, I am a servant of my Lord Jesus Christ."

The king's rage grew, but he remembered their previous friendship, so he did not make a display or an outburst of anger. As in preceding times, he tested him with flatteries and by promising gifts; but at other times, with threats of hideous punishments and torments, to see, perchance, if he would waver. But the coward was not effective, because the saint thirsted for martyrdom.

The blessed James, in order to cause the tyrant to slay him quickly, answered him thus:

"In vain you labor, attempting with feeble means to sow wheat in the guff, or to hold back the winds in a net. In this way, it is not possible any longer to change my belief from piety. So then, lay aside all hope, so as not to conceal your wrath any more. Cut my body into pieces, punish, burn it, do with it as you will, but my soul you will not be able to turn to godlessness."

Again, the king tempted him with flatteries to ensnare him. Hiding his anger, he said to him with feigned love:

"James, pity your body, your blossoming manhood, remember our immeasurable friendship. Be not deprived of any worldly pleasures in this sweet life, in order to receive harsh pains and the bitterest death for these uncertain good hopes. I promise you that you will have wealth and power in my kingdom, greater than before. Yes, my beloved and dearest friend, I entreat you not to have contempt for our great friendship and appear before me ungrateful, because, if you disobey, it is necessary - although I do not want to - that you be taught a lesson. But do not think that I will be lenient later: no, it is not true, but I will change the love that I have for you now, into hatred that is commensurate with your disobedience. And I will deliver you to unheard of, horrible torments."

James boldly replied:

"O king, do not waste time importunately. Do not frighten me with torments, nor insincerely compliment me with tributes and gifts, because I despise from my heart all temporal enjoyments, empty glory, decaying riches and bodily sensuality, in order to inherit the true wealth and the honor, inexpressible delight and bliss. Wherefore, gladly I divest myself of wealth and glory, friends and relatives, mother, wife and all the pleasures of the body. And not only these things, but I am prepared to receive 10,000 deaths, only not to injure my sweet Christ, the Beautiful One among the sons of men, Who fashioned the sun, moon and the

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remainder of creation, and His divine will is equal to His power. He who denies Him goes to endless death."

This, in addition to other things, uttered the blessed James. And the king went into a furious rage, realizing it was impossible to pervert him. Wherefore, he took counsel with a certain senator, who recommended such severity, that upon hearing it, the king shuddered. That is: to dissever the joints, starting first with the fingers of his hands, and afterwards, the remainder of the joints. O the inhuman decision! What other unsparing tyrant ever revealed such pitilessness towards his friend? O savage judgment and inexorably merciless soul! Whoever heard this felt empathy; not only the faithful, but even those godless idolators among the nations, who wept at such a ferocious verdict. But our true martyr did not shrink back upon hearing such a sentence; rather, he hastened to the stadium with excessive joy and eagerness.

A large portion of the population assembled in order to witness the hideous sight. Not only people, but also the angels and demons were present at this mighty contest and violent duel. The angels were present in order to assist the saint invisibly to receive the crown, and the adversaries to prevent him, if possible, and to frustrate his purpose. Also, the word of the apostle was fulfilled: "...for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men" (I Cor. 4:9). For even the Great Promoter of contests and Heavenly King was there and stood above him to strengthen him in this match and, in the end, to grant him the imperishable crown. As the admirable and magnanimous man observed the fierce executioners and the forbidding instruments with which they were to cut him into pieces, he did not fear those devices prepared. Every kind soul, seeing another suffering thus, would feel sorrow and pity for him as a man. But he did not show any gloom and never uttered anything foul, nor did he suffer to do anything unworthy of his valor. But, as if his flesh was insensible, he stood with a joyous glance and cheerful face.



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The executioners tied the hands and feet of the martyr and after, they placed his right arm on the anvil, saying to him:

"Behold what will happen to you for your disobedience. We have been instructed to cut off your members one by one: your fingers, hands, feet, arms, ankles, knees, and finally your head. Therefore, reason before you taste these horrors and do that which is for your own good, for there is no repentance afterwards."

Certain of his friends and acquaintances implored him with tears to have pity on himself and not voluntarily receive such a horrendous and evil death. The saint answered them:

"Weep not for me, O wretched ones, but lament for yourselves and your children, as you will go to eternal damnation with your gods for these temporal pleasures. I, for a day's pain, will inherit the Kingdom of my Lord Jesus Christ and, also, indescribable joy and everlasting bliss."

After saying this, he noticed that the executioners were readying their tools to cut off his limbs. Consequently, he asked time to make a prayer to the Lord, and he prayed that He would strengthen and assist him to complete the contest and receive the crown of martyrdom.

As they began the martyrdom, the executioners cut off his **thumb**. And he turned toward heaven and said:

"O Lord Jesus Christ, the Help of all those who are helpless, the Hope of all the hopeless, and the Strength of all the weak: receive the first branch of this tree by Thy mercy. For as the vineyard gives forth leaves even when it is trimmed, thus will I appear before Thy judgment seat, safe and upright on the Day of Resurrection."

When they cut off his **second finger**, he said, "Receive, O Lord, the second branch of the tree that Thy right hand hath planted."

His face was joyous and festive, as if he perceived our Lord's future endowments. Then, they cut off his **third finger**, and he said, "With the three youths in the furnace, I sing to Thee and honor Thee, O Lord; with the choirs of martyrs, I sing praises to Thy holy name."

As they cut off his **fourth** and **fifth fingers**, his mouth was filled with praise, and he said, "In my five senses I bless Thee, O

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Lord; wherefore, receive the good pains of my right hand as a blessed fruit, O Master."

Then they severed the **fingers of his left hand, one by one**, and he was grateful at each, saying an appropriate praise and hymn.

Certain of his friends who stood by said to him, crying bitterly:

"Beloved brother, have pity upon yourself, for they will administer upon you an evil death, and in losing your life, you will be deprived of your mother, wife, and the rest of life's enjoyments. Do not grieve for your fingers, as we have doctors here capable of curing them. You have sufficient wealth and do not require the use of your hands. So listen to us, for your own good, and just say one small word with your mouth, so that it will appear as if you obeyed the king's command and, thereby, you will be delivered from the evil torturers. But in your heart, you believe in God and, when you return again to your country, you can repent and ask forgiveness of Him."

And he answered them:

"God forbid! I will not commit such a pretense. One cannot serve two masters. Whosoever puts his hand to the plough and turns back, is not worthy of the heavenly bliss. It is not right for me to love my mother and wife more than I love my God and Savior. Whosoever does not lift up his cross to follow Christ, is an unworthy servant. For these small pains, I go to my Master to receive the laurel of martyrdom. Therefore, I pray thee, do not sorrow for me, but rejoice and be glad with me."

As the executioners heard this, they cut off **the toes of his feet one by one**, in order to submit him to even more pain. But he was firm and adamant, thanking them at each toe, singing a hymn. At one point he was heard to say, "The afflictions of the present are not worthy of the future glory."

At other times, he encouraged himself, saying, "Why is my soul saddened?" and many other verses.

Then, they cut off **his feet at the ankles**. And then, they severed them again at **the knees**. Afterwards, they mercilessly cut off **his hands and arms**. But the resolute one endured with a great soul, as he saw his fingers, hands and legs on the ground. He did not utter one angry word at the executioners or the judge, but only prayed incessantly, in order to comfort and encourage himself, with verses from the Old Testament, such as: 'I will sing unto the Lord throughout my life, I will chant to my God for as long as I have my being. May my words be sweet unto Him, and I will rejoice in the Lord.'

Behold a true martyr's valor! Behold Thy wonders, O Christ King! How did the invincible one withstand such rigorous pains and afflictions? O ye listeners, were you not awe-stricken, or was

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not your soul grieved at the sight of such an unprecedented mutilation? All those who were present at this fearful and horrid sight (not only the faithful, but even the persecutors, and the very senseless rocks), must have felt pity. Only that unbending soul and friend of Christ did not weep, but withstood those terrifying and awful tortures with a serene and upright face. For such is the love of God. When it possesses a noble soul, it empowers it to overcome nature and not to fear pains and punishments. Without this power, it would have been impossible for him to bear so many torments' as did the others who, for the loss of an arm or leg, died instantly, being unable to bear the excruciating pain. But the praiseworthy and ever-blessed one did not experience three or ten deaths, but twenty or thirty. **The blood ran as rivers, the flesh fell, the veins were severed, the nerves plucked out, the arteries destroyed, the members were scattered.** The audience fainted and the executioners grew weary. The demons, having been vanquished, were horror-stricken and panicked. The angels marvelled. But he that endured, seemed joyous, and his eye was not morbid, but cheerful, and he looked merry, rather than dismembered.

Then they cut off **the thighs** of the martyr, and the pain was so acute, that he cried out saying, "Christ, help me!"

And the executioners said to him: "Did we not tell you that you will suffer extreme pains and tortures, and you did not believe us? Now ask your God to save you from these punishments."

And he answered: "I do not ask Christ to rescue me from the torments, but to strengthen me till the end, so that I may receive the laurel, O senseless ones. I felt pain, in order to prove that I am in the flesh. But earlier, my mind was in my Lord Jesus Christ, Who lessened my pains, and I did not feel anything. Truly, just as the anvil is struck by the hammer and feels nothing, also I felt nothing, as I was being tormented. Therefore, I thank my God, and beg of you not to feel sad for me, but do dissolve this old structure of my flesh, that a new and brighter one will be raised up. Since you have cut off the branches, do not hesitate to chop down the tree also, that I may receive the heavenly bliss. For just as a deer wishes to reach the rivers of water, so I desire in death to attain my Creator."

Even though he was dismembered thus, the invincible one safeguarded his piety and won trophies against all of them, with the aid of the Holy Spirit and his unsurpassed desire. He remained, therefore, **only with his head and torso**, a dreadful sight to behold. Alas! But the villainous rulers, seeing that, even though he was dismembered, he was not afraid, but, rather, they were frightened. They had no further hope for him, so they ordered his honored head to be cut off, as the other members of his body. They ordered this, not because of any merciful sentiments or sympathy, but from their excessive shame, so that it would not seem that James defeated them, dismembered thus, and that the invisible power of the Lord might not be confessed in the saint.

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ESCHATOLOGIA

After the decision [to cut off his head], the saint was solaced somewhat. He moved his honored head with difficulty, and prayed thus: "O Lord, Father Almighty and Lord Jesus Christ and Most Holy Spirit, I thank Thee that Thou hast enabled me to endure these torments for Thy holy name. But I pray Thee, make me worthy to complete this contest, for 'the pangs of hell came round about me' (LXX, Psalm 17:5). They have severed all my limbs. I have no legs to stand on and worship Thy majesty, nor hands to lift up to heaven to pray and call Thy name. They left me neither knees, nor arms, the merciless ones, but I remain as a branchless tree without roots. Therefore, I beseech Thee, O Most Holy King, abandon not Thy servant, but take my soul out of the prison of my body, and place it among Thy holy martyrs, so that we may glorify forever Thy majesty in the ages to come. Amen."

After he said these things, they cut off **his honorable head**, and thus, he achieved all those indescribable blessings: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him" (I Cor. 2:9).

If then, as Saint Paul says, each one of us will receive a reward according to his own labor, how great will be his reward, who died a myriad deaths and witnessed suffering above all human endurance? In all truth, just as the pains and anguish were atrocious, so will the pleasures be painless, the rewards countless, the delights unutterable, and the crowns glorious. The blessed James received his martyrdom in Babylon, on Friday, November 27. Immediately afterwards, certain Christians, beloved of God, approached the guards and offered them money, in order to permit them to take part of his holy relics. But out of fear for the king, they did not wish to consent to this. Then the pious ones left, as if to depart, but actually they hid nearby and awaited till it was dark to procure at least a part of the relics. And as the night wore on, the guards fell asleep, the pious Christians crept forward, quietly, and carried away the precious relics of the martyr. They buried them devoutly and with honor, as an everlasting memorial and remembrance to the glory and praise of our Lord Jesus Christ, to Whom is meet honor, song and worship, with the Father and the All-Holy Life-giving Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

From the *Great Synaxaristes of the Orthodox Church*.

Relics

According to St. Nikolai Velimirovich: "His head is to be found in Rome and a part of his relics in Portugal, where he is commemorated on May 22." Portions of his relics are found in many other shrines throughout the world, including the Great Cave Monastery in Kalavryta, Greece as well as the Barlaam Monastery at Meteora.

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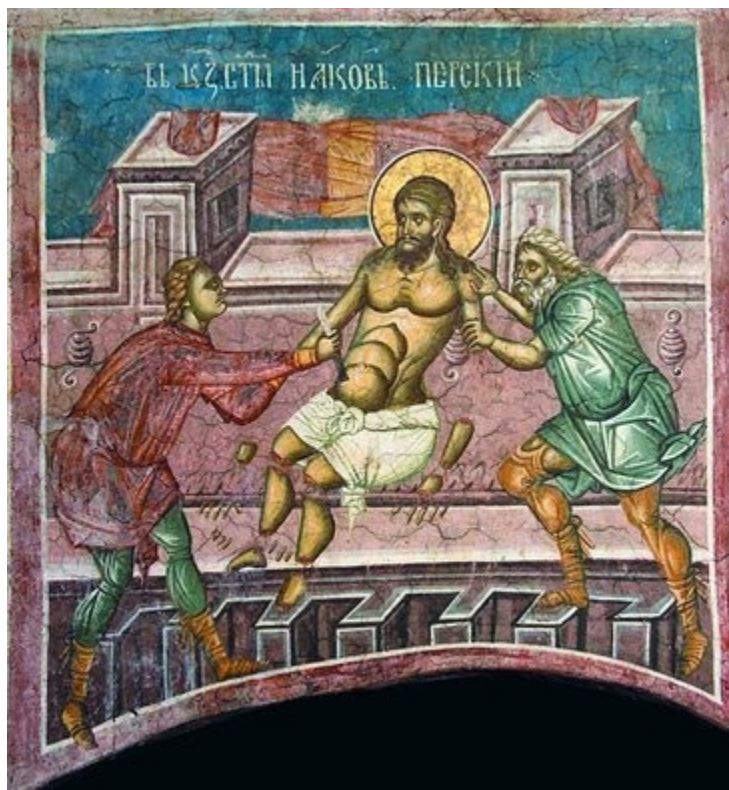
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A Further Reflection Offered By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

When the executioners severed **the thumb** of St. James's right hand, he said: "Even a vine is pruned in this manner, so that in time a young branch may grow." At the severing of his **second finger**, he said: "Receive also, O Lord, the second branch of Thy sowing." At the severing of his **third finger**, he said: "I bless the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit." At the severing of his **fourth finger**, he said: "O Thou who acceptest the praise of the four beasts [symbols of the four evangelists], accept the suffering of the fourth finger." At the severing of the **fifth finger**, he said: "May my rejoicing be fulfilled as that of the five wise virgins at the wedding feast." During the severing of the **sixth finger**, he said: "Thanks be to Thee, O Lord, Who at the sixth hour stretched out Thy most pure arms on the Cross, that Thou hast made me worthy to offer Thee my sixth finger." At the severing of the **seventh finger**, he said: "Like David who praised Thee seven times daily, I praise Thee through the seventh finger severed for Thy sake." At the severing of the **eighth finger**, he said: "On the eighth day Thou Thyself, O Lord, wast circumcised." At the severing of the **ninth finger**, he said: "At the ninth hour, Thou didst commend Thy spirit into the hands of Thy Father, O my Christ, and I offer Thee thanks during the suffering of my ninth finger." At the severing of the **tenth finger**, he said: "On a ten-stringed harp I sing to Thee, O God, and thank Thee that Thou hast made me worthy to endure the severing of the ten fingers of my two hands, for the Ten Commandments are written on two tablets." Oh, what wonderful faith and love! Oh, the noble soul of this knight of Christ!

(Apostolic Reading)

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HYMN OF PRAISE: The Holy Martyr James the Persian

By St. Nikolai Velimirovich

The Creator does not lose repentant souls:
 He loves a true penitent the most.
 James denied Christ the Living God
 For the sake of the godless emperor, his flatterer.
 His mother reproached him as did his wife:
 "All the riches of the earth are as transient as foam."
 James repented, and bitterly repented,
 Then openly spoke about what he had kept secret:
 "A Christian I was, and again I am a Christian:
 Foolish and weak are your idols!"
 This James said, as he stood before the emperor;
 This he said openly and remained true to it.
 The emperor took all his imperial gifts from him,
 And clothed the wondrous James with torture.
 James was reddened with wounds and blood,
 And like eagles on a carcass, men attacked him!
 They dismembered the body of Christ's hero,
 And cut St. James into bits.
 Now James prays before God in Paradise
 That all Christians overcome all attacks.




Apolytikion in the First Tone

Be entreated, O Lord, by the sufferings endured for You by the Saints, and we pray You, heal all our pain.

Kontakion in the Second Tone

O stout-hearted James, persuaded by thy noble wife, and fearing the dread tribunal, thou didst scorn all fear of the Persians with their profane decrees, and thou wast shown forth to be a most wondrous martyr of Christ, when all of thy body was pruned like a vine.

Posted by John at [10:11:00 AM](#) 



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