



## **Saint Sava of Serbia**

Memory celebrated January 14 (27)

### **Saint Sava at Mount Athos**

Rastko, youngest son of the Serbian district judge, STEFAN NEMANJA, was different than his two brothers, Vukan and Stefan, in that he was modest, quiet, retiring and pious; he enjoyed very much to read good books and to meditate in solitude. His brothers on the other hand, like many other sons of aristocrats, preferred a life of recreation and play; liked gentlemanly apparel and good food.

At one time there came to the home of Stefan Nemanja, in Serbia, a group of monks from [Mount Athos](#), who were seeking financial aid for their monasteries. Greatly impressed by their narrations of the beauties of Mount Athos, and of the pious life led by the monks, Rastko ran off with these monks to Mount Athos, where he promptly entered the monastery, and was given the name of SAVA. He lived in the monastery as a most modest monk, praying to God and fasting regularly, but, above all else, he liked to read the holy books and to listen to the instructions of the monks.

After an interim of several years, and at the invitation of Sava, old Stefan Nemanja, who had relinquished his throne to his son, Stefan, came to Mount Athos and entered the monastery as a monk, SIMEON, by name. The devout father and son founded the Serbian Monastery HILANDAR, in Mount Athos, where they then settled, and where, shortly thereafter, St. Simeon died in the arms of his son, St. Sava. The death of his father was beautifully and touchingly described by St. Sava.

The Monastery Hilandar became the fount of Serbian Orthodoxy and Serbian education. Here books were translated and written; icons fashioned, as well as other church articles, thence to be dispatched to every Serbian village and hamlet.

To the monastery, too, came many of the youth of Serbian heritage, to be taught and eventually to become priests of the church.

## **The work of Saint Sava**

With their father now gone, Sava's brothers, Vukan and Stefan, were at strife over the throne, and as a result of their discord, the Serbian State, as well as the Orthodox faith, was gravely threatened with extinction.

In the face of these difficult circumstances, Stefan remembered his youngest brother, Sava, and asked him to return to his homeland and to bring with him the body of their father. Bearing the remains of St. Simeon, St. Sava returned to his country, coming to the Monastery of STUDENITZA, the endowment of Nemanja, and over the remains of their father, effected the reconciliation of his warring brothers.

Following this, he was appointed Superior of the Monastery of Studenitza, instructing and training many of the monks to become Serbian priests and teachers, and in addition, assisting his brother Stefan, in affairs of state, counselling him wisely at all times.

The Serbian State had progressed to the point of being respected and powerful. Thus, at this time, Stefan, proclaiming himself king and placing the royal crown upon his head, became the first Serbian king, STEFAN, THE FIRST-CROWNED. There was a need also, that the Serbian Church become independent, for, up to the time of St Sava, the church superior or BISHOPS in the Serbian State, had been Greeks, who, to the Serbs were considered aliens. Realizing the necessity for the Serbs to have their own archbishops and bishops, St. Sava, in accord with his brother, King Stefan, departed for the city of NICEA (Asia Minor), where lived the Greek king and PATRIARCH. Sava requested the appointment of a Serbian bishop, which would further strengthen the Orthodox Faith, whereupon the Greek Patriarch elevated St. Sava to the office of the first Serbian ARCHBISHOP. Thus, the INDEPENDENCE OF ARCHBISHOPRIC of the Serbian Church was established in the year of 1219.

Upon his return to Serbia, St. Sava, in agreement with his brother Stefan, divided the Serbian land into bishoprics and appointed Serbs as bishops. For himself he chose as his seat, the endowment of King Stefan, the Monastery of ZITCHA. In this, the Monastery of Zitcha, St. Sava, with great solemnity, crowned his brother as king. Thus, the coronation of the first king of Serbia, Stefan, the First-Crowned, took place in an Orthodox Church, by a Serbian Archbishop. St. Sava worked especially toward the enlightenment of the Serbian people. Numerous churches and monasteries were erected everywhere, throughout the state. Monasteries in that

time served as schools, in which the Serbian youth were taught to read and write. Following completion of their learning, they were appointed priests and teachers. Thus, thanks to the efforts of St. Sava.

## **St Sava's repose**

In his declining years, St. Sava made a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, there to visit Christ's grave. Prior to his return, he stopped at TRNOVO, to be the guest of his friend, the Bulgarian emperor. St. Sava, celebrating the Divine service of [Theophany](#), on a chilly day, caught cold, became ill and died on January 14, (27) in the year of 1235.

The Bulgarian emperor insisted that the body of St. Sava remain in Bulgaria. Consequently, the Serbian king, VLADISLAV, nephew of St. Sava, with great difficulty succeeded in claiming the body of his uncle and interring it in Serbian soil at the Monastery of MILESHEVO, an endowment of St. Sava.

To the Serbs, the grave of St. Sava was most sacred. During the time of Turkish dominance, the Serbs came from all sides to his grave, offering prayers to God, and seeking consolation in their suffering, and strength in their hope for liberation. Realizing to what extent the Serbs revered their saint, the Turks disinterred the body of St. Sava from Milieshevo, taking it to BELGRADE at a place called VRACHAR, where on a pyre, his body was burned to ashes, in the year of 1594.

In burning the body of St. Sava, the Turks believed that the people would forget entirely their great benefactor and enlightener, even that his name would be forgotten. But they were wrong!

Albeit centuries have passed since the cremation of his remains, there does not exist today, a Serb who is not familiar with his name, nor is there a Serbian school existing which fails to venerate him every year.

By reason of his meritorious and holy life, Sava was proclaimed a Saint. The Serbian Church celebrates St. Sava as their greatest saint and enlightener. His memory is commemorated by the Orthodox Church on January 14 (27).

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