

February 19

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Jacob Baradeus (d. 578) pastor

Today the West Syrian Church, which in its early years came to be called the 'Jacobite' Church by its Chalcedonese adversaries, commemorates its pastor and namesake Jacob Baradeus.

Jacob was born in Tella d'Mauzelat, Syria, at the beginning of the sixth century, and became a monk at the nearby monastery of Psilta. He lived in a time of crisis for the churches of Syriac tradition, which were profoundly shaken by the dissent between Chalcedonese and non-Chalcedonese Christians. It was often members of the second group, called 'monophysites' because of their christological tradition, who suffered the consequences of this division.

Jacob went to Constantinople around 528. The empress Theodora, who was anti-Chalcedonese, and the patriarch of Alexandria Theodosius recognized in him the qualities necessary for the revival of the West Syrian Christian communities, which had been left without a pastor after the death of Severus of Antioch. Jacob had earned a reputation for his asceticism, erudition, and ability to hold firm under duress.

He was ordained bishop of Edessa by Theodosius, and travelled throughout the Christian East from Egypt to Syria, going as far as Armenia and the border of Persia. Everywhere he went he preached the Gospel, comforted persecuted Christians, and ordained priests, seeking to create the structures necessary for a renewal of his church. In order to avoid drawing attention to himself, he disguised himself as a travelling salesman ("baradeus" in Syriac).

His efficient organization brought the West Syrian Church through the most difficult period of its history, and laid the foundations for a future rebirth.

Jacob Baradeus died in the Egyptian monastery of Qasiun on July 30, 578.

A READING

O God, in your might you have done all things, and you gave the universe its foundation through the will of your only-begotten Son, who revealed to us the knowledge of truth and the Spirit of gentleness, holiness and majesty.

You gave us your beloved Son and only-begotten Word, Jesus Lord of glory, as shepherd and physician of our souls.

With his precious blood you established your Church and constituted the order of presbyters. You gave us guides so that we might come to know the Name of your Christ, which is now known throughout the universe, and so be acceptable to you. Send the spiritual and holy Spirit upon your servant who is present here so that he may protect and serve your Church, which has been entrusted to him: may he ordain priests, anoint deacons, consecrate churches and altars, bless homes, intercede efficaciously, heal, judge, save and liberate, bind and loosen, rinvest and remove, receive and separate.

Grant him wisdom and understanding so that he may recognize your sovereign will, discern sin, know the norms of justice, and so be able to resolve the most complex problems and undo all the bonds in which evil keeps us imprisoned.

(Syriac liturgy, Prayer for episcopal ordination)

Philothea of Athens (1522-1589) martyr

On February 19, 1589 Philothea of Athens, who is commemorated as a martyr by the churches of the Patriarchate of Constantinople, died after a long agony.

Baptized Regula, she was a native of Athens and came from a well-educated, noble Christian family. Her sophisticated cultural background was always accompanied by a mature vision of faith.

At the age of fourteen, she married a rich Athenian in accordance with her parents' wishes, but she became a widow after only three years of marriage. She decided not to remarry, and instead converted a small church dedicated to St. Andrew into a monastery, where she took the monastic name of Philothea and involved herself in many educational and charitable activities. She cared for the poorest women of the city, especially unprotected young women who always risked being enslaved by Turkish dominators. In just a few years Philothea founded laboratories, schools, and a hospital for these women, and even a shelter for the city's poor.

Philothea's courageous words and actions in favor of the slaves soon aroused the anger of the powerful. She was imprisoned and abused, and on October 2, 1588, during a liturgical celebration in one of the city's monasteries, she was so badly beaten that she never regained her health.

Philothea's mortal remains rest in the metropolitan church of Athens, where she is remembered as one of the best loved saints of the Church of Greece.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Gal 3:23-4:5; Mk 5:24-34

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Turibius of Mongrovejo (d. 1606), bishop (Ambrosian calendar)

Pantaleo, martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (11 amamsir/yakkatit):

Fabian (d. 250), pope of Rome (Orthodox Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:

Peter Brullius (d. 1545), witness to Christ to the point of bloodshed in the Flanders

MARONITES:

Archippus and *Philemon* (I cent.), apostles

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEKS CATHOLICS:

Archippus, apostle

Philothea of Athens (Greek Church)

WEST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:

Jacob Baradeus, bishop