

THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULLETIN VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

THE FINAL RESTING PLACE FOR JESUS' FRIEND

We know the story of Lazarus – the man Jesus raised from his grave of 4 days. This great miracle is commemorated by our Church the Saturday before Palm Sunday. October 17th, however, holds significance, for it is on this day that we remember the bringing of the earthly remains of St. Lazarus to their final repose.

During the time of our Lord, Lazarus lived in the town of Bethany with his sisters, Martha and Mary. We can only speculate on what a strong bond that must have existed between this saintly family and Christ. After the death and resurrection of Jesus, Lazarus embarked on a mission of his own, taking the message of His Master throughout the Roman Empire. Ultimately, his journeys took him to the island of Cyprus, where he became a bishop of the Church. It is said that Lazarus remained there for some thirty years, giving the community a firm foundation of Christianity. He died at the age of 58 and was buried in a modest chapel with this inscription of his casket: ‘The Fourth day – friend of Jesus Christ.

Cyprus, however, was not meant to be the final resting place of Lazarus. Some 800 years later, the tomb of Lazarus was in ruin and badly in need of repair. The Emperor Leo of Constantinople replaced the crumbling chapel with a magnificent cathedral and monastery. But this still is not the end of this story! Leo soon realized that the relics of such an important saint should rest in a place where more believers would venerate them. On October 17, 891 AD, the relics of St. Lazarus were ceremoniously brought to Constantinople and placed in a bronze casket, which was enshrined in a cathedral erected in his honor. Soon after, Leo arranged for the relics of another close acquaintance of Christ – Mary Magdalene – to be brought to Constantinople. Finally, with the dedication of the cathedral that was built in his honor, the earthly journey of St. Lazarus came to an end.