

FROM LAST WEEK'S OCTOBER 18TH BULLETIN!

“FROM THE ORTHODOX WEEKLY BULLETIN . . . VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

‘TRULY THIS WAS THE SON OF GOD’

Saint Mark's account of Christ's Crucifixion introduces us to the saint we examine today: MARTYR LONGINUS. Longinus was NOT a follower of Jesus. On the contrary, he was the Roman Centurion assigned to keep order at the cruel execution of our Lord.

Undoubtedly, Longinus has been given similar assignments before. But this particular task would change his life forever. It is recorded in Mark's Gospel that this soldier was so moved by the final moments of Christ's life that he uttered the phrase that will keep his memory alive through out eternity: **“Truly this was the Son of God.”**

The tradition of our Church is that Longinus immediately followed the Apostles, renouncing the Emperor and all that Rome stood for. He remained in the city of Jerusalem, where he was able to win many converts to Christianity. It was powerful testimony indeed for others to hear how a pagan servant of Caesar had come to accept and believe in the one true God at the cross.

It did not take long for Pontius Pilate to learn of the *“treason”* of Longinus. Trained assassins were sent out with orders to bring the head of the former centurion back to the governor! Longinus did not even attempt to flee from his pursuers, for he knew if they failed to carry out their mission, their lives would be taken. So it came to pass that this brave warrior of Christ gave his life for his new-found Master in 36 A.D.

When the head of Longinus was brought back to Pilate, he ordered it to be discarded with the trash as one last act of humiliation. This relic was recovered by the Christian community and given proper burial. Many miraculous healings have been experienced by those who prayed at his tomb.

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DEMETRIOS AND NESTOR: MARTYRS FOR CHRIST

The story of the Great Martyr Demetrios and his friend Nestor takes us back to the early fourth century and to the city of Thessalonica. Demetrios was in the military service of the old Roman Empire, but he was also a Christian. Indeed, he was a skilled Christian orator who had converted many to the faith of our Lord. For this he was arrested and thrown into prison.

A young believer named Nestor, came to visit him and the two became brothers in Christ. The Emperor Maximian came to Thessalonica one day and spent some time amusing himself in the cruel gladiator fights of the amphitheater. He was particularly proud of a huge, powerful gladiator names Lyeus. The emperor challenged anyone to fight his favorite, and even promised a reward to any contender.

Nestor told Demetrios of the giant and they spoke of the opportunity to witness the power of God against the pagan Lyeus. After Demetrios prayed with Nestor and invoked the Lord's blessing upon him, the young man went and fought victoriously over the gladiator.

Emperor Maximian was furious. He ordered Nestor to be beheaded, and when he learned of the role Demetrios had in the matter, ordered him to be slain. And so the two valiant Christian friends became martyrs for Jesus Christ. Demetrios became the patron saint of Thessalonica, and later, when the persecutions came to an end, a church was built over the site of his martyrdom. Many Greek churches throughout the world have been named after Demetrios.