

FROM THE ORTHOX WEEKLY BULLETIN . . . VESTAL, CLIFFWOOD, NEW JERSEY

ST JOANNICUS THE GREAT

Joannicus was born in 765 in Bithynia, Asia Minor. His parents were poor and early in life the boy became a lonely shepherd.

During the reign of Emperor Leo, Joannicus became a soldier. He was big and strong, and no doubt was sought after for the army. He fell into the heresy of the “iconoclasts” who sought to destroy the use of icons and images in the Church.

But when Constantine and Irene came into power, he returned to Orthodoxy, repenting of his sins. He now felt more devoted to God. He began a penitential course of fasting and praying. However, he did not leave the army for another six years.

After he distinguished himself during a campaign against the Bulgarians, he laid down his arms for good, left the vanities of the world, and entered a monastery. Later Joannicus retired to the side of Mt. Olympus, where he spent several years exposed to the cold of winter and the heat of summer, without a shelter. Then He entered a cave, and lived in it for many years, partaking only of bread and water, as part of his penitential discipline.

After another twelve years of his life, Joannicus entered the monastery of Eristae, and took the monastic habit. He was blessed with the gift of prophecy, and many miracles are related of him. His prudence and moderation were of great value in guiding Methodios, the Patriarch of Constantinople, in dealing with the Iconoclasts. The holy monk advised the patriarch to treat the iconoclastic clergy as erring brothers, and not to reject those who returned to Orthodoxy.

In 846 Patriarch Methodios, hearing that Joannicus was dying, went to see the old monk, asking him for a final blessing and prayer. The two had a lengthy talk about the faith. Joannicus foretold that the patriarch himself would shortly follow him into eternity. After a final prayer and a farewell kiss, they separated.

Joannicus returned to his cell to prepare for his impending death. Three days later, he fell asleep in the Lord. Eight months later, Methodios died in Christ, thus fulfilling the prophetic words of the saint.

Even after he died, miracles were wrought by the saintly Joannicus. His fame and veneration spread throughout the church. St. Joannicus is termed “*the Great*” for the remarkable measure of austerity and sanctity of his faith. The brilliance of his life continues to shine until today.