

February 26

E. *Our Father among the Saints Porphyrius, Archbishop of Gaza*

He was the son of noble and wealthy parents. When he was 26 years old he left his native city of Thessalonica. Having distributed all his estate, he entered one of the Egyptian monasteries as a monk. Being in Jerusalem, he was wonderfully healed from a severe illness and, by revelation from God, elected bishop of Gaza, populated at that time with idolaters. In this rank he had to endure many "misfortunes, illnesses, troubles and sorrows". But the humble ascetic by his own meekness, patience, prayer and wonders converted almost all the inhabitants of Gaza to the holy faith. One by one the idols fell and the pagan temples were closed and Christian temples¹ were built. St. Porphyrius died in the year 421. His relics still repose in Gaza.

Kontakion, tone 2

**Adorned by your dedicated habits,
You glowed in the vestments of the priesthood,
O All-blessed, Divinely-wise Porphyrius.
And you spread beauty by the glory of your healing,
Unceasingly praying for us all.**

Martyr Sebastian suffered together with St. Photina (see March 20).

Martyr Christodoulos died by the sword with St. Photina (see March 20).

John Kalfa (i.e. the architect), was tortured to death for faith in Christ by the Turks in Constantinople in the year 1575.

Mezhetsky Icon of the Mother of God appeared near Kiev in the year 1492.

¹ Many pagans were hostilely opposed to St. Porphyrius. A famous and wealthy Roman, an inveterate pagan, was among the enemies of the hierarch. It happened that his favorite daughter-in-law could not be relieved of her burden in any way. The suffering of the confined woman continued for some days and increased so much that several times the sick woman appeared dead. Having compassion for the suffering of the confined woman, one of servants of the pagan advised him to invite St. Porphyrius to come to the sick woman. Love for the helpless sufferer conquered the intransigent one to St. Porphyrius and the latter was invited to come to the sick woman. Having come to her in the house, St. Porphyrius first of all demanded that all "charms" ("evil influences", "bewitching eyes") be completely removed and when this demand was met, he prayed to the Lord and the confined woman was safely relieved from her burden with a live child and she remained alive. That is how this event in the life of St. Porphyrius was narrated by one of his closest disciples (in the Reader's Menaion this event is told a little differently).

The narration of this event has great value for explaining the expression: "about bewitching eyes" which is in the second prayer "For a woman about to give birth to a child". "Charms" (in other words "evil influences", "bewitching eyes"), mentioned earlier, and are amulets used by Roman pagans for protection from the evil eye, from a spell. These amulets, with the attributes of Roman matrons, were hung on children, nailed to entrance doors and so forth. The name "charm" was given to the very actions, receptions, acts by which superstitious Romans reflected the evil, pernicious eye from themselves.

So for example, if a bystander, intentionally or casually, should look on a baby sleeping in a cradle, the mother of this baby or his nurse must spit three times to the side to protect the baby from a spell or from the evil eye. And this is called a "charm". Whoever wished that the coming day would be successful for all his work and

enterprise and that an evil fate would not touch them, according to the superstitious popular Roman view, that upon rising from bed in the morning, one should stand on the floor with that foot first, as offered by the superstition and to put the shoe on this foot first. And such acceptance, as well as all others, has been understood by Romans, as "charm", as armor protecting from the striking evil eye.

"Charms", on special stands, were also stretched out before the eyes of the confined woman, were hung up before her bed, placed on the confined woman and child. On all such amulets are depicted shameless nasty things, but meanwhile according to popular belief, this could protect the confined woman from all that is malicious and dangerous from happening by the evil eye is why the confined woman should steadfastly gaze on these amulets.

As a true Christian shepherd, St. Porphyrius also demanded the removal of these amulets when invited to pray for the ailing confined woman. It is evidently clear that St. Porphyrius deals not only with a spell or an evil eye when he commanded to remove "charms - evil influences", bewitching eyes from the patient that also was used by superstitious persons for reflecting the evil eye, - badges, medallions, emblems, amulets on which were represented abominable nasty things which shamelessly should cause feelings of revolt at all sightings, more for women and especially the sick mother.

Agreeing with this are the words of the prayer in Peter Mogila's Book of Needs: "from bewitching eyes", and are read this way: "from the eyes of indignation" i.e. from the sight that infuriates amounts to an essence in all of personal "cruelty" ("evil influences"), and images depicted on amulets were being honored by superstitious pagans as guardianship from the evil eye, from abominations.

So, on the basis of everything that has been said above, it should be possible to rightfully declare that under "bewitching eyes", by natural reasoning, it is impossible to suspect that the words of the prayer of the holy Church are praying for liberating or protecting from evil, hateful eyes. And if there is a place, where this graceful prayer penetrates in order for the Lord to protect the confined woman swimming in natural sufferings from every hostile spirit, from jealousy, envy and everything abominable, the abominable evil vision and listening to the thoughtless tales of various women [babas], from accepting every superstition and action, which can exasperate, excite indignation not only in the eye but also in the depth of the right-believing soul of every honorable Christian. Only unbelievers in the power and grace of the prayer of the Holy Church can be tempted with the words "from bewitching eyes" and to suspect that the Holy Church has anything in common with such superstition. (For details refer to *Dushepoleznoe Chtenie* [Edifying Reading] 1891, 10)

*S. V. Bulgakov, Handbook for Church Servers, 2nd ed., 1274 pp. (Kharkov, 1900), pp. 0095-0096.
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