

+ Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili
President of the Holy Synod in Resistance

The Holy Martyr Isauros

and the Church dedicated to him in Corfu



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I.

Life and Martyrdom

of St. Isauros

(17 June)

Commemoration

**Of the Holy Martyr Isauros
and those with him:
Basil, Innocent, Felix,
Hermias, and Peregrinos.**

As is well known, the Church of Athens was founded by the Holy Apostle Paul in 36 A.D. during the course of his second missionary tour (Acts 15:40 – 18:22).

After his famous speech on Mars Hill, *“certain men joining themselves to him believed, among whom was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them”* (Acts 17:34).

At the end of the third century, members of the Apostolic Church of Athens included Isauros, “Deacon of the Mysteries,” Basil, and Innocent.

During the reign of the Roman Emperor Numerian (283-284), they departed from their native city of Athens and went to Apollonia of Illyricum, which was an ancient colony of Corfu on the shores of present-day North Epiros.

There, after a revelation by a Holy Angel, the Saints entered into a cave and found Felix, Hermias, and Peregrinos, who were Christians in hiding.

St. Isauros strengthened them in the Faith and taught them not to love temporal, transitory things, but to desire the incorruptible and eternal.

Having been nourished by these spiritual teachings, Saints Felix, Hermias, and Peregrinos nourished, in their turn, St. Isauros and his companions in a bodily way by bringing them food and,

having distributed their belongings to the poor, remained with them.

After a short while, an opportunity arose to prove that the words of the Athenian Deacon and teacher of the Faith had not been in vain, but had fallen "*on good ground.*"

The relatives of Felix and of his companions tried to wean them from their fellowship with Isauros, but they were unsuccessful because the Saints turned away from them since they were idolaters.

The relatives then denounced them to the Proconsul of Apollonia, Tripontios, who, when he was unable to separate them from the Holy Faith of Christ, ordered that they be beheaded.

Thus did Saints Felix, Hermias, and Peregrinos receive the unfading crowns of martyrdom.

In the meantime, the Proconsul Tripontios also arrested Saints Isauros, Basil, and Innocent, and he handed them over to his son, Apollonios, to revert them to idolatry.

Apollonios attempted to force them to deny the Christian Faith with excruciating tortures, through fire and water, but he was unsuccessful. On the contrary, indeed, the Saints became even more faithful to the Lord, as they were marvelously and miraculously preserved unharmed by Divine Grace.

This was the occasion for many idolaters to be drawn to the Holy Faith of Christ, among whom included notables of the city of Apollonia, the Senators Rufos and Roufianos, who were brothers.

In the end, since the three Saints from Athens remained firm in their Christian Confession, it was ordered that they be beheaded.

Thus, having prayed, the valiant athletes of Christ drenched the land of Epiros with their holy blood, and their blessed souls ascended victoriously to the heavenly abodes of Paradise and were counted among the glorious choir of Martyrs for our Holy Faith.

II. Contemporary Accounts

On Sunday, 7 September 1992, Mrs. Marianthy Grammenou gave us the following interesting information about the Church of St. Isauros.

1. I RESIDED next door to the Church of St. Isauros in a semi-underground house. Living there, I was upset because I was very poor.

Quite a number of times, I saw St. Isauros in my sleep without knowing who he was, and he would say to me: “My child, do not be upset. I will look after you.” And he would give me a piece of bread.

The next day, when I would go to take a certain woman’s clothes to wash them, she would put rusks and a kilo of bread in a bag for me.

I also saw the Saint giving me food, and the next day the woman for whom I washed put food in a bag for me.

When there was bad weather, that house would often be flooded, but the water would not reach the spot where there were Icons or my bed. The Saint’s protection was evident.

2. Yet another evening, I heard a Liturgy being celebrated....

I opened the door to the courtyard and asked the neighbors: “Are you listening to a Liturgy on the radio?” “No,” they told me.

Approaching the door to the Desilla factory (facing it was the small window of the Altar), I saw the entire Church illuminated, and the Liturgy could be heard being chanted by Angelic voices for an hour and a half.

This would occur every fifteen days for about three and a half years.

3. One evening, I saw the Saint in the hallway burning paper, and he said to me: “Come and warm yourself.”

I answered him: “You are burning paper. You aren’t burning wood so that I can warm myself.”

He answered: “I am burning the witness of my martyrdom.”

I then understood that St. Isauros was a Martyr, because until then I had not known it.

4. All of these things took place when, for many years, the Church was abandoned.

When Liturgies began to be served there once more, I had a dream in which a hand was pulling me, and I heard a voice telling me: “Get up and come to my house.”

I fell asleep again because of my illness and heard the same voice a second time.

The next day, I went to the Church (on the Feast Day of St. Marina), and for the first time, I saw an Icon of St. Isauros, just as I had seen him so many times in my sleep.

5. I have dedicated a small song to him as a token of my love for him.

*O Holy Father Isauros,
thou art my protector.
I have thee ever in my thoughts
and in my mind.
I am an orphan in the world
and I have no one.
For a Father, I have God,
and for a brother, thee.
Come down my path.
As a shelter for my head
I shall have thee, O St. Isauros,
protector of my life.*



**The Church of St. Isauros
in Garitsa, Corfu.**

III. Historical Facts About the Church

1. The Eighth Department of Byzantine Antiquities of Ioannina, in its document with the protocol number 2585 (29/10/93), gives us the following historical facts about the Church of St. Isauros in the Garitsa quarter of Corfu:

The Church is an Ionian Island basilica of modest dimensions with a three-sided apse which projects eastward and a low bell-tower in the NE corner. The Church is mentioned for the first time in the catalogue of Churches of 1693 compiled by the great Protopresbyter Avlonites. The Church thus already existed before the end of the seventeenth century.

Inside the Church, there was a wooden Templon with wood-carved ornamental elements, which was later replaced by another, newer one.

Among the Icons, there was a large Icon of St. Cyril of Alexandria, which was a copy of the great Icon of 1654 that is located in the Museum of Antivountiotissa, and which is the work of the painter Em. Tzane.

2. The following items have also been preserved from the old Church: a) an Icon of St. Spyridon, which has been kept in excellent condition; b) an Icon of St. Isauros, and c) four vigil lamps and a censer.

Inside the Church, towards the Beautiful Gates, there is a grave with the following inscription:

“THIS GRAVE COVERS/ THE BODY/ OF
HIERODEACON IOANNIS MONASTIRIOTIS/
SON OF ANDREW/ 26 YEARS OLD/ REPOSED ON 11 NOV.
1867.”¹

3. On 26 September 1988, a resolution was passed by the

Ministry of Culture for the “*characterization of the Church of St. Isauros in Garitsa, Corfu, as an historical monument*”:

“We characterize the Church of St. Isauros, which is located in Garitsa, Corfu, as an historical monument. It is a one-room, rectangular building with an adjoining bell-tower on the east side: a characteristic example of Ionian Island Churches, which dates to the end of the seventeenth century and is mentioned in the catalogue of Churches compiled by the Great Protopresbyter Avlonites.”²

4. In 1754, the Great Protopresbyter³ of the city and island of Corfu, Spyridon Boulgares, drew up an inventory of all of the island’s Churches and Monasteries, including, on 13 September 1754, the Church of St. Isauros in Garitsa. The contents of the inventory have been preserved at the Historical Record Office of Corfu.

Notes:

1. For the custom of burying the dead inside the Church building (because cemeteries in the modern sense did not then exist in Corfu), see D. C. Καπαδοχου, *Ναοὶ καὶ Μοναστήρια Κέρκυρας, Παξῶν καὶ Ὁθωνῶν στὰ μέσα τοῦ ΙΗ αἰῶνα* (Athens: 1994) p. 47.
2. See ΦΕΚ 788/Β/26 Oct. 1988, p. 11.
3. The “Great Protopresbyter” had the position of surrogate Bishop and exercised the rights of an eparchal Bishop (except for the performance of Ordinations), submitting directly to the Ecumenical Patriarch. Until 1799—at which time the Metropolitan’s Throne of Corfu was re-established (it had been abolished in 1267)—, he was regarded as the spiritual and political leader of Corfu.