



**The Holy Martyrs Kerykos and Julitta:  
Exemplars of Christian Stability,  
Confession, and Suffering**

*by Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Fili*

**“I know** thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot; I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth” (Revelation 3:15-16).

**These** words, which our Lord addresses to the Bishop of Laodicæa in the Divine Apocalypse (the Book of Revelation), unfortunately apply to the majority of Christians in our days. Oftentimes, these Christians, by the lukewarmness of their love for our Christ, are not as God wishes them to be, namely, the spiritual “light” and “salt” of the world (St. Matthew :13-14).

**But** why is this so?

**Very** simply because these Christians are not “ardent” in the Lord; they do not love our Savior fervently; they are not zealots of His law and holy commandments. This is why they lack the blessed courage of confession, the spirit and mind of confessors.

**Christians** of our age have been influenced very deeply by the spirit of worldliness; they have been conquered by ambition, greed, and sensuality; that is, they have become enslaved to egotism, disdain for their brothers, and worship of the flesh. In this way, however, they drive away the Grace of the Holy Spirit, their hearts grow cold, and they are overcome by indifference.

**It is** natural, therefore, that they feel themselves at a disadvantage when they are in a worldly environment; that they are ashamed to show

their Faith; that they are afraid to confess—with humility and discretion, of course, and when circumstances demand it—their Christian identity.

**And** although Christ is a “jealous God”—that is, though He wants us exclusively for His own and does not want us to worship the god of the world and of our passions—, and although our Savior is the Bridegroom of our souls and desires with great love that we be united to Him, unfortunately there are Christians who think about what other people will say of them, fearing to be ridiculed and to be mocked, or to “lose their reputations”!

**Thus**, for example, they avoid making the sign of the Cross when they pass by a Church or when they happen to be sitting at table to dine with people of a worldly frame of mind. That is to say, in the final analysis, they demean and distress, in their ingratitude, Him Who was crucified for their sake and for the salvation of the world; whereas they *should be* expressing to Him their love and their gratitude.

**Other** Christians, again, out of embarrassment and cowardice, are quick to break the fast during days or periods when non-fasting foods are forbidden, since they ostensibly do not wish to offend those who—out of ignorance or indifference—do not fast! Indeed, there are some who fall even lower: Without protest, they tolerate individuals who utter dreadful blasphemies in front of them, defiling every sacred and holy thing of our Holy Faith!

**I am** overcome with heartache, when I reckon with the distressing phenomenon of such lukewarm Christians; and in my desire to help them to become “ardent” for our Lord, I am undertaking the publication of this work. It contains, in a very condensed form, the life and martyrdom of St. Kerykos, who—although a three-year old infant—proved to be a great Confessor of our Holy Faith, as well as the life of his mother, St. Julitta.

**Thus**, I hope that this little booklet will constantly remind our Christian people of the salvific duty of confession, as this emanates from the words of Christ: “Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father Which is in Heaven; but whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father Which is in Heaven” (St. Matthew 10:32-33).

## The Life and Martyrdom of Sts. Kerykos and Julitta, His Mother

**S**t. Julitta flourished during the terrible and tempestuous times of the Emperor Diocletian (284-305), that fearful persecutor of Christians. She came from Iconium in Lycaonia, Asia Minor, and was one of the most pious and faithful of Christians. After the death of her husband at a very young age, she dedicated herself to bringing up her infant son, whom she Baptized with the name Kerykos.



**She** taught him up to the age of three, with exceeding care and diligence, but particularly by her example of faith in, and love for, our Lord Jesus Christ, which she expressed in prayer, a holy and virtuous life, partaking of the Holy Mysteries, and the confession of His Holy Name.

**When** the victims of the persecution against Christians multiplied, St. Julitta took her little and much-loved Kerykos and sought refuge in Seleucia, Cilicia. But there, too, the flame of persecution raged.... Thus, the Saint fled to Tarsus, the birthplace of St. Paul, the Apostle of the Nations.

**There**, the governor of the city, Alexander by name, a ferocious and bestial man, learned of the Saint and summoned her to defend herself. Seeing the love which she nurtured for her little, Grace-filled Angel, Kerykos, he attempted to conquer her Faith by threatening her and her child with death. But the Saint remained steadfast and undaunted, and was ready to offer herself as a living and blameless sacrifice, together with her young son, rather than deny the true Faith.

**So**, the governor angrily snatched little Kerykos from his mother's arms and began to wheedle, caress, and kiss him, in order to sway his mother and to attract the boy to his side. However, our Lord, Who grants wisdom and enlightenment to infants, bestowed, through the Holy Spirit, "a mouth and wisdom" (St. Luke 21:15) upon Kerykos, who was small in age but great in confession.

**The** Divinely-illuminated infant began to invoke the Name of Christ

with a stammering voice and to cry: "I am a Christian! ...Let me go to my mother!" Indeed, in order to escape from the tyrant, he began to strike him and kick him in the stomach, saying clearly and persistently: "I love Christ!"

**Alexander** the Governor, unable to endure the blows of young Kerykos and, in particular, the defeat and the disgrace occasioned by the child's confession, blew up in rage and with ferocity and inhumanity threw the infant down the steps of the tribunal, kicking him with all his might. The blessed infant received a mortal blow to his head and surrendered his holy and innocent little soul to Christ the Master. In this way, he was counted worthy to receive with glory the crown of confession and suffering.



**At this** sight, the thrice-blessed mother of the Child-Martyr, overcoming nature by her faith in Christ and giving thanks to God, said to the tyrant: "Even as you crushed the head of my child, so will your false religion be crushed, you harsh and pitiless ruler."

**After** experiencing fearsome tortures, and yet not denying our sweetest Jesus, St. Julitta, the mother and Martyr, was beheaded in the year 304, receiving the crown of martyrdom, that she might rejoice with her three-year-old lamb, St. Kerykos, and be glorified together with him in Heaven by the Angels and on earth by men.

**Our** Holy Orthodox Church celebrates their memory on July 15.

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**T**he Life, Confession, and Martyrdom of Sts. Kerykos and Julitta are truly a powerful reproach for Christians of our age and a constant reminder of our duty and responsibility to emulate them, since our Faith is founded on the blood of such exemplary persons, who sacrificed even their very lives for the love of our Savior.

**May** our Lord Jesus Christ grant Orthodox Christians the Grace to confess His Holy Name and to put His saving commandments into practice for their eternal salvation. Amen!



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(\*) Source: *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XVI, Nos. 3 & 4 (1999), pp. 19-21.