



■ On the Occasion of the Commemoration of St. Kyriakos, Patriarch of Jerusalem (28 October)

The Philanthropy of the Righteous Sozon*

Thrice-Blessed Almsgiving and Its Munificent Heavenly Recompense

In the days of St. Kyriakos, Patriarch of Jerusalem, there lived a very charitable man named Sozon.

Walking through the city square one day, he saw a poor man who was naked and shivering from the cold. His heart ached for him. Thus, he took off his garment and gave it to him. A short while later, he returned home. It was nightfall, and he lay down to sleep.

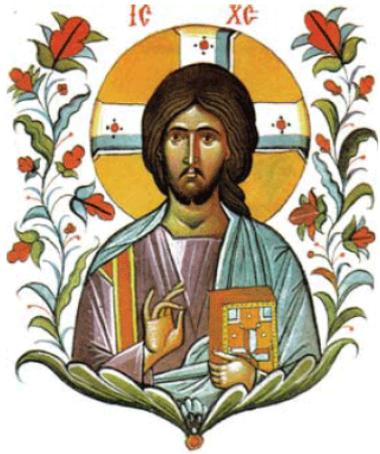


He then dreamed that he was in a magnificent garden illuminated by a pure, ethereal light. It was adorned with multitudes of flowers—roses and lilies—and slender-trunked trees that exuded an exquisite fragrance from their roots up. The trees were so heavy-laden with the most splendid fruit that their branches were bowed down to the ground. Each one had a unique beauty. Numerous birds of all types and colors were chirping melodically amongst them. Their chirping was so divine that one would think it was coming from heaven. All of the trees, plants, and flowers undulated gracefully. Seeing and hearing all of these things, the man felt an indescribable sweetness and inexpressible pleasure.

As he was ecstatically observing these things, a young man came up to him and said, “*Follow me.*” He began to walk behind him, and they shortly reached a golden-railed fence. Casting his gaze beyond, through the gaps of the golden rails, he saw a courtyard, at the far end of which was a magnificent, glittering palace. As Sozon stood watching, sixteen winged men, radiant like the sun, came out of the mansion. Walking four by four, each group was carrying a chest trimmed with gold. As these Angels of God were traversing the fabulous forecourt, Sozon

understood that they were headed in his direction.

When they had approached the golden railings and were exactly opposite him, they stopped, lowered the chests from their shoulders, and placed them on the ground. They now appeared to be waiting for someone important to arrive. And, indeed, Sozon soon saw a sublime man descending from the mansion and coming towards the Angels.



“Open the chests,” he ordered them, “and show this man what I am keeping for him in return for the garment that he lent me a short while ago by means of the poor man.”

They straightaway opened the first of the golden chests and began to take out royal robes and garments—some pure white, others embroidered, but all sublime. They spread them out before him, asking him:

“Do you like them, Sozon?”

And he answered with awe:

“I am not worthy of looking upon even their shadow!”

They continued, however, to show him brilliant, ornate, and golden robes, reaching thousands in number.

When the Lord of the Angels had in this way given him to understand the meaning of the words *“He shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life,”* He said to him:

“You see, Sozon, how many good things I have prepared for you, because you saw me naked and had compassion on me and dressed me? Go, then, and continue to do the same. If you give one garment to a poor person, I will prepare things for you a hundredfold.”

Hearing this, Sozon asked the Lord with awe, but also with joy:

“My Lord, will you do the same for all of those who help the poor? Are you keeping good things for them a hundredfold and eternal life?”

And He replied:

“Whoever will sacrifice houses or fields or wealth or glory or father or mother or brothers or sisters or wife or children or any other good on earth

'shall receive a hundredfold and inherit eternal life.' Therefore, never regret even one of your acts of charity, degrading the poor man to whom you have given something, lest, instead of recompense, you suffer twofold. For he who does a good thing, but later regrets it or degrades the poor person, not only loses his reward, but also shall be found guilty on the Day of Judgment.

Following these words, Sozon woke up, filled with wonder at the vision. He immediately rose from his bed and gave his other garment to someone whom he knew was in need.

That night, he once again saw the same vision; and in the morning, without delay, he distributed all of his possessions, renounced the world, and became an admirable monk.



(*) Source: *Άγιος Κυπριανός*, No. 258 (January-February 1994), pp. 215-216.

