

Freedom into God. His Eminence Metropolitan Nicolae's Meditation at the Feast of Holy Emperors Constantine and Helen



On May 21 of every year, the Orthodox Church honors the Holy Emperor Constantine and his mother Helen, who are called “equal to the Apostles” because of their witness and the ministry they accomplished in the Church of the Savior.

We all know the story of the conversion of the Emperor Constantine after seeing a heavenly vision of the sign of the Holy Cross. We also know the history of the deeds of the first Christian emperor, deeds revealing his awareness of having been chosen by God to fulfill a mission in the Church. But this mission was neither a simple one nor one that simply happened by chance. It was a mission to provide social freedom so that the personal freedom gained by Christ on the Cross for every human being could be fulfilled.

The freedom of which we are speaking is that of the liberation of mankind from sin and death. A spiritual liberty which was hidden, held captive in a world of the

vanity and insanity of the emperor's belief in himself as a god and the giver of liberty. The emperor believed himself to be almighty, to the point of annulling that which God had given to man—his freedom. God Himself respects His gift, the freedom granted to man created in His image, but not so the emperor. In this manner the emperor set himself above God, something described by the Psalmist as folly. He who puts himself in such a position cannot last. For the natural order of things is turned upside down, that which God has ordained is changed by man, and becomes an order which is against nature.

In order to return to that which was ordained by God, to His Divine order, the Emperor Constantine was called to liberate man. So that man could receive the news of salvation, of reconciliation with God, of deliverance from sin and death. So that man could receive the news of the Resurrection. Its Light could not be kept hidden under a bushel. No matter how powerful the earthly emperor might have considered himself, he could not hide that which even the powers of hell could not—the Lord's Resurrection. This bondage was conquered by the hands of Constantine, which became the hands of the Risen Christ, pulling not only our ancestors out of bondage, as we see in the icon of the Resurrection, but also those contemporary persons who were enslaved by the emperor.

Saint Constantine understood his calling and accepted it. Was it possible for Constantine to have not understood it? Could he have refused it? Could he have failed to see the signs of the times and where salvation was coming from? No doubt we all need to respond to these questions, for they are incumbent on us all. They are not rhetorical, but they refer to our own responsibility before our conscience and before God.

We can also honor Saints Constantine and Helen through these responses, for they originate in the example of their lives and the understanding of their mission!

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