

The Feast Day of Saint Sebastian of Jackson In the Year 2020 of Our Lord



The year behind us was remarkable in so many ways, and, much the same, this year's celebration of our holy father Sebastian of Jackson was no exception.

Devotees and pilgrims from his ancestral Herceg Novi, Jackson's sister city, from his native San Francisco, from Los Angeles, where he founded the first church and served therein, as well as from other parts of California and the United States of America, unfortunately could not fulfill their great wish this year to visit Jackson again on the day of its Patron Saint. However, it was precisely in their absence that we felt their presence perhaps even more strongly than in the previous years. Filling the half-empty church with their countenances, within our hearts and with our spiritual sight, we pondered how grateful we had been for each other in the past, how much we appreciated and nurtured our dearly paid unity in the Body and Blood of Christ, crucified and shed for us? How much had we valued Time as a gift,

how wisely had we used it, redeemed and sanctified it with our lives, or had we delayed our repentance and reconciliation while forgetting that we do not know the day or the hour that our earthly journey will come to its end? Now, at a time with far fewer of us being physically present in the church, each face shone before us as the living icon of God, and those who were absent seemed closer and dearer than ever before.

Bishop Maxim brought us great consolation and encouragement with his arrival on Saturday afternoon. The Nativity Fast began on that day, and we were happy and grateful to begin, with his blessing and in his presence, the cleansing and decoration of the manger of our hearts for the Nativity of God-Child. During the Vespers service, before which the church's heating had suddenly failed, a few of us who could participate, with masks on our faces and chilled to the bones, but nonetheless side by side and with our Bishop in our midst, felt in our hearts that which the Holy Apostles Peter, James and John had felt inside their own hearts on Mount Tabor, at such an inconspicuous and uncomfortable place, having nothing but one another, along with the transfigured Lord in His Glory with Saint Elijah and Moses, and so we also whispered: It is good for us to be here (Matt. 17:4). The heating could not be repaired until Tuesday, upon completion of the entire celebration, rendering memories of our childhood, during the Sunday and Monday worship services in our cool church, of times when the only source of heat in our temples was the warmth of God's grace and sacramental presence together with the fervency of our faith and love.

The Holy Liturgy was served on Sunday, when we prayerfully remembered the founders of our church. Holy Apostle and Evangelist Matthew was celebrated on that day, and the Parable on the Good Samaritan was read from the Holy Gospel. Bishop Maxim reminded us that, although we have many reasons to be proud of our ancestry, affiliation and calling, we are expected to confirm them through our deeds and our lives, and while doing good and taking care even of those who are foreign to us according to the worldly comprehension, we can bring them to the Lord as well and make them our brethren. Saint Sebastian, the main founder of the Jackson Parish, did just that by eradicating all corrupt divisions, bridging distances and through his love, goodness, faith and prayer, through Christ within him, connected the inconnectible, the East and the West, the North and the South. After the Divine Liturgy, on a beautiful, sunny and warm day, in accordance with the local health department regulations, lunch was served outside, next to the church hall. For years now, on the Sunday of the church founders, bakalar meal (cod fish with potatoes and garlic) is served, prepared the way it is done in the Bay of Kotor, the ancestral land of many of the church founders. It is prepared according to the

recipe and under the supervision of Ms. Danica Milosovich, who is ninety-one years of age, and whose parents-in-law had come to America from the villages of Kameno and Podi in the Municipality of Herceg Novi. During lunch, Mr. Bogdan Beau Gillman, a member of the renowned Jackson Vukovich family on his mother's side, on behalf of the Senior Fund, established by his grandfather Nedeljko Nedjo Vukovich of blessed memory, currently managed by his Aunt Lana, presented to Bishop Maxim and the Diocesan Publishing House Saint Sebastian Press (that has produced twenty new titles in this year alone) a very generous and significant contribution for the printing of the Monograph about the Jackson cemetery. The treasurer of the Parish Council, Protodiakonitsa Danica Pavlov, presented on behalf of the Parish a contribution for the same purpose. After several years of thorough and detailed preparations, at the initiative and under the watchful eye and editorial guidance of Bishop Maxim, through great labor of Dragana Mašić, Orthodox Christian Faith teacher from Novi Sad in Serbia and the author of the book, with diligent collaboration of Diakonitsa Victoria Stojanovich, and with graphics solutions of the gifted Denis Vikić from Vrnjci, the book is now in press. It will be composed of 450 pages of quality paper, one thousand top-level photographs in full color, works of two master photographers, Lazar Larry Angier and the above mentioned Diakonitsa Victoria, extensive introductions about the waves of Serbian immigration to America and about other Serbian Orthodox cemeteries in this country, as well as alphabetical indexes (both in Serbian and English alphabets) of all the names from the tombstones in Jackson's cemetery.

Another joyous novelty this year is the completed service to Saint Sebastian of Jackson and San Francisco. The service written before the canonization of the Saint in 2015 of our lord, was complemented by the Matins Canon by the same author, a deacon until recently and now presbyter Veljko Vasiljev from the Eparchy of Backa, as well as the Akathist, the divinely inspired work of nun Olimpijada (Kadić) from the Metropolitanate of Montenegro and the Littoral. On Sunday evening, on the Eve of the Feast of Saint Sebastian, the Akathist was read for the first time festally and solemnly, for the most part in its English translation (through the effort of Zorana Bjelcic from Belgrade, Serbia), by the gathered clergy: Bishop Maxim, Protopresbyter Vasilije Cvijanovic from Saint Sebastian's San Francisco Bay, Protopresbyter Stephen Tumbas, retired Parish Priest of Jackson and active adviser to the Jackson Mission and the Camp of Saint Sava, current Parish Priest Marko Bojović, and Parish Deacon Dragan Stojanovich, along with the prayerful participation of the faithful. After the service, the clergy and the parishioners received the newly-printed wall calendars for the coming year, featuring photographs of church life and graphic designs by parishioner Lazar Angier, including two photos giving homage to the two newly-reposed Hierarchs of our

Patriarchate, Serbian Patriarch Irinej and Metropolitan Amfilohije of Montenegro and the Littoral, of blessed memory.

On Monday, another unusually beautiful day for this time of year broke out. Before the doors of the church, Bishop Maxim was greeted by Protopresbyters Dane Popović and Paul Volmensky from Sacramento, along with previously mentioned Proto Stephen, and the Parish Priest and Deacon. Deacon Dragan Stojanovich was ordained on this great Feast, and this year marks the six-year anniversary of his faithful, dedicated service. Only a month earlier, the Feast of Saint Longin the Centurion marked the twentieth anniversary since the ordination of Protodeacon Triva Pavlov, retired Parish Deacon, bearer of the Order of Saint Sebastian, who exerted much effort and labor along with the rest of the community in favor of canonization of Archimandrite Sebastian, as well as for the transfer of his holy relics from the Žiča Monastery to Jackson. With Bishop's blessing, Fr. Paul, the Head Priest of the Church of Holy Ascension in the capital city of the State of California, of the Russian Orthodox Church Outside of Russia, delivered an inspired sermon upon completion of the Gospel reading. His love and respect for Saint Sebastian became even greater after receiving healing at his canonization five years ago. At this occasion, Fr. Paul spoke about the relationship between God the Father and God the Son and our knowledge of the Father through the knowledge of the Son and the unity with the Father through the unity with the Son. The Son is also the Bridegroom of our souls and of the Church as the community of people who had once been sold to sin, but the Bridegroom redeemed them, adorned them, and received them into His palace. Around the palace courtyard, tempting voices of seducers, the demons, are heard, which would like to call us back to our old, sinful life, but we will remain deaf to those voices if we remain in the chamber of the palace, in our hearts, faithful to our Bridegroom and Redeemer. In this feat and labor, our wonderful Saint Sebastian will be our courageous intercessor, who in his missionary work all over the world, in and by himself, carried, brought and spread the Heavenly Kingdom and in each person discerned and venerated the icon of God. During the Liturgy, the Slava bread and wheat were blessed for the four-member Rice family and for Lazar Angier, who, after the divine service, served the festal lunch to the closest circle of guests in the yard of their lovely and warm home.

We have been notified that Divine Liturgies were served on this Feast Day in numerous temples of our Church in America. In the afternoon hours of the Feast Day, we were visited by the Head Priest of the Russian Cathedral in San Francisco, which is the resting place of the relics of Saint John of Shanghai and San Francisco the Wonderworker, with a request to serve a moleben service before the relics of

Saint Sebastian. On that occasion, he informed us that the priest of the Tikhvin church in Moscow, with whom he visited Jackson in 2016, had received a piece of the Saint's relics for his church from the Russian Archbishop Kyrill of Western America, where the Divine Liturgy was also served on this day. During the year 2020, we also learned that two children born this year were named after our Saint Sebastian of Jackson, even though the families are not of Serbian origin. One little boy was born in North Carolina to a Greek father, who is an Orthodox Christian priest, and a mother who is an Orthodox American and took part in her youth in the ceremony of canonization of Saint Sebastian in Alhambra in the year 2015. The other boy was born in the San Francisco Bay to Orthodox Americans, the father of Italian and mother of German-Finnish descent. Both families have visited the church during the year, venerated the relics of Saint Sebastian and received the icons of the Saint. From Saint Sava's and Saint Sebastian's Bay of Kotor and Herceg Novi, we received information that a great number of icons of the Saint, embellished with precious metals and stones, were prepared for Saint Sebastian's Feast, and the sale proceeds will be used to establish the Fund of Saint Sebastian, thereby continuing his missionary work, and, among other things, the parish home will be renewed in Sebastian's ancestral Sasovići near Herceg Novi, as the House of Saint Sebastian. From Belgrade, we heard that this year also, for the third year in a row, the family of a young attorney from Zemun celebrated the Feast of the Saint as its second Slava – Patronal Feast, after their home was visited by Saint Sebastian through a piece of his holy relics on its way to the Monastery of Cetinje in Montenegro, at the request of Metropolitan Amfilohije of blessed memory. At the Annual Parish Assembly, in two weeks, following the example of the hard-working and dedicated Kolo of Serbian Sisters, which has tirelessly acted under the patronage of Saint Petka dating back to the thirties of the last century, the men of Saint Sava Parish in Jackson intend to establish the Brotherhood of Saint Sebastian.

As we near the completion of writing this article, the news has reached us that only two days following the Feast of Saint Sebastian, the wonderful priest of the church of Saint Sebastian founded last year in Carson City, the capital city of the state of Nevada, Protopresbyter James Barfield has reposed in the Lord. This American-born man, who became Orthodox in his youth, also founded the church of the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist in Reno, Nevada. This blessed and meek soul unselfishly sacrificed himself for his reasonable flock and for the growth of the Holy Church and will continue to shine and illuminate us from the world to come.

“Our holy father Sebastian,” as we sing in the newly written Akathist, “urge the Lord to grant us peace within and around us, angelic chastity, humility and zeal, love sincere and warm, unfading joy of Resurrection, and true salvation, so that we

may be one in Christ our Lord,” and to become worthy of liberation from the current troubles and sufferings, so that we may celebrate next year, in greater numbers and beauty, in health and in joy, your holy feast and the Most Holy Trinity, Whom you had glorified with all your being and life!

























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