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January 18, Feast Day of Agios Athanasios

On January 18 the Greek Orthodox Church celebrates the Feast Day of Agios Athanasios.

Agios Athanasios was born in Alexandria in the year 296, and from his early childhood, he had an inclination to the spiritual life. He was a deacon to Archbishop Alexander and accompanied him to the First Ecumenical Council (Nicaea, 325).

It was at this Council that Athanasius became renowned for his knowledge of, devotion to, and zeal for Orthodoxy. He contributed greatly to the destruction of the heresy of Arius and the strengthening of Orthodoxy. He wrote the Symbol of Faith (the Creed) which was adopted at the Council.

Following the death of Alexander, Athanasios was elected Archbishop of Alexandria.

He remained in his calling as Archbishop of Alexandria for forty years, although not for the entire time on the archiepiscopal throne. With few exceptions, he was persecuted by heretics throughout his life.

Of the emperors, he was persecuted the most by Constantius, Julian and Valens; of the bishops, by Eusebius of Nicomedia and many others; and of heretics in general, by Arius and his followers.
Athanasios was forced to hide from his persecutors at various times: once in a well, once in a grave, and sometimes in private homes or in the deserts.

Twice he was forced to flee to Rome. Only for a while before his death did he live peacefully, as a good shepherd among his good flock, who truly loved him.

Few are the saints who were so mercilessly slandered and so criminally persecuted as was St. Athanasios.

His great soul patiently endured all for the love of Christ and, in the end, emerged victorious from this entire terrible and long-lasting struggle.

For counsel, for comfort and for moral support, Athanasius often visited St. Anthony the Great, whom he respected as his spiritual father.

A man who formulated the greatest truth, Athanasius had much to suffer for that truth — until the Lord gave him repose in His Kingdom as His faithful servant, in the year 373.

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