

CHRIST'S BELOVED DISCIPLE & BOSOM BUDDY

by

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Saint. John the Theologian (+105 A.D.), son of Zebedee and Salome, is one of three Saints bearing the title of "Theologian" in the Orthodox Church [the others being St. Gregory of Nazianzus (+390) and St. Symeon the New Theologian (+1020)]. He was present at the Transfiguration and was the only Apostle to stay with Christ and His Mother, the Virgin Mary, at the Cross.

Christ particularly loved John, who was the youngest of the Apostles. He was the only apostle who was not martyred dying a natural death at around 105 years of age; and, upon his insistence was buried alive.¹ That Saint John would not suffer martyrdom as the rest of the apostles and perhaps remain to unmask the Antichrist was prefigured by the Lord's words to the Apostle Peter after His Resurrection and not long before His Ascension in response to Peter's question concerning what was to become of Apostle John:

Then Peter, turning about, seeth the disciple whom Jesus loved following; which also leaned on his breast at supper, and said, Lord, which is he that betrayeth thee?

Peter seeing him saith to Jesus, Lord, and what *shall* this man *do*?

Jesus saith to him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee? follow thou me.

Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die: yet Jesus said not unto him, He shall not die; but, if I will that he tarry till I come, what *is that* to thee?²

Upon the insistence of Apostle John, he was buried alive. On the following day, when the tomb was unearthed it turned out to be empty. This event somewhat affirmed the belief in the conjecture of some Christians that Apostle John will not die but will live until the Second coming of Christ and that he will unmask the Antichrist...³

What is crystal clear is that it was the Lord's will that His beloved disciple, His bosom friend, remain in this world longer than any of the other apostles.⁴ Bosom friend? Yes, here is another instance where a rather common term, this time about good friends, best friends, "bosom buddies," germinates from Holy Scripture. This comes from the Apostle John laying his head on the Lord's bosom at the Last Supper:

Now there was leaning on Jesus' bosom one of His disciples, whom Jesus loved.

Simon Peter therefore beckoned to him, that he should ask who it should be of whom he spake.

He then lying on Jesus' breast saith unto him, Lord, who is it?⁵

Christ's love for His beloved apostle is self-evident, considering that from the Cross He entrusted His Mother to him saying "Behold thy mother!":

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the *wife* of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene.

When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, Woman, behold thy son!

Then saith he to the disciple, Behold thy mother! And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own *home*.⁶

The beloved disciple heeded the Lord's words concerning himself with the Ever-Virgin and "like a loving son" served her until the Mother of God's Dormition (falling asleep).⁷

That Saint John was not martyred does not mean he did not suffer for the Lord. He most assuredly did. He was a stalwart witness (martyr in that sense) for Christ and suffered severe persecutions in Rome being sentenced to death for confessing Christ. They first tried a cup of deadly poison, didn't work, and later they utilised a cauldron of boiling oil- still didn't work! The Lord saved him each time- John was meant to live longer than the other Apostles. Perhaps from frustration, the authorities sent John to be exiled on the island of Patmos. On the island, his preaching was accompanied by miracles. He spread the Gospel, cast out the demons from the pagan-god temples and healed large numbers "a great multitude of the sick".⁸ The Theologian wrote the Apocalypse (Revelation) whilst on Patmos and later his Gospel.

John's love of his neighbour, fearlessness for his own safety and spiritual determination are graphically illustrated by his pursuit into a robbers' den of a youth, who had strayed from the Royal Path:

John was visiting/'supervising' churches in the city of Smyrna and took notice of a keen youth in the group of listeners. He entrusted his spiritual development in Christ to the local bishop, who accepted his charge and promised to look after the boy's welfare. John returned to Ephesus, the youth was instructed and baptized and John thereafter lost track of him. The youth became somewhat of a renegade eventually becoming the ringleader of a band of thieves.

When John visited Smyrna again some time later, he asked the local bishop to return his pledge which Christ and John had entrusted to him. The bishop tearfully confessed that all was not well, filled in John on the details including the information that he was hiding in the mountains with his band of outlaws. The Saint immediately headed for the mountains where he was seized by the gang's lookouts. He demanded to be taken to their leader. When he saw the youth, now gang leader, he pleaded with him to take action to save his soul telling him that he had been sent to him from Christ. The young man threw down his weapon and came into the Saint's arms asking forgiveness.

The Apostle fell with love to the feet of the brigand, kissed his right hand, a hand defiled with many murders and crimes, and promised to plead on his behalf that the Lord would forgive him... Together they returned to the city, where Saint John led the brigand chief into the church as a remarkable example of repentance and the quickening triumph of apostolic love.⁹

The love St. John expresses is Divine love upon which love for our neighbour depends. Our Faith is our source of love, and there can be no separation of our love from belief:

“Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.¹⁰

“...If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us¹¹.

“...God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.¹²

Love is integrally connected to love of God.¹³ We are not free to divorce personal from Divine love as the ecumenists would lead us to believe. It matters a great deal what we believe!

St. John the Theologian, symbolised by the eagle due to the loftiness of his theological thought¹⁴, is the only one of Christ's early Disciples/Apostles upon whom the Church bestowed the title of “Theologian” due to his “being the seer of the mystiered Judgements of God”.¹⁵ John's Gospel, more than any of the others, captures the spiritual meaning of Christ and His Incarnation:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but *was sent* to bear witness of that Light.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world.

He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not.

But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name.

Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

John bare witness of him, and cried, saying, This was he of whom I spake, He that cometh after me is preferred before me: for he was before me.

And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.

For the law was given by Moses *but* grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.

No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him.¹⁶

The towering, yet humble, witness of John tugs at our heartstrings and beckons us steadfastly, hauntingly, to accept the Saviour's call, exercise our free will and follow Him. John's earthly time was more than 100 years, and he still speaks to us from our Father's bosom. His message, the cry of Christ to His children, resounds through the ages of ages. We can hear but are we listening?

+ In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

¹ *Saint John the Theologian, Apostle and Evangelist*, p.2,
http://www.fatheralexander.org/booklets/english/saints/john_evangelist.htm.

² John. 21: 20-23

³ *Saint John the Theologian, Apostle and Evangelist*, op. cit., p. 2.

⁴ Orthodox America, *Saint John the Theologian Preacher of Divine Love*, p. 1, <http://www.roca/OA/154/154d.htm>.

⁵ John13:23-25

⁶ John 19:25-27

⁷ *The Translation of St. John the Theologian*, p.1 at Internet <http://www.protomartyr.net/saints/JohnRepose.html>

⁸ *id.*, p.2.

⁹ St. John the Theologian Preacher of Divine Love, op. cit., p.2.

¹⁰ I John 4:7

¹¹ I John 4:12

¹² I John 4:16

¹³ Bishop Theophan the Recluse, *On Truth and Love in the Writings of St. John the Evangelist*, p.1 and see the full discussion through p.3 at St. Vladimir's website <http://www.stvladimirs.ca/library/theophan-truth-love.html>.

¹⁴ *The Translation of St. John the Theologian*, op. cit., p.2.

¹⁵ *id.*

¹⁶ John 1:1-18 and see all of Chapter 1.