

## **CARLOS WHO DENIED CHRIST**

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

In a certain region of Italy, there was a nobleman named Carlos who spent his livelihood on an array of revels and carnal pleasures. Consequently, it was not long before he became impoverished. No longer having the means to continue living extravagantly as before, he became deeply distressed. He reached a point of such dejection and discontent that he uttered words of blasphemy. One day he decided to go find a certain sorcerer, who was known to dwell in a nearby forest, in order to ask him if the devil could help him become rich. As he made his way through the forest, the devil appeared to him in the form of a soldier, and told him: "I am the one you are searching for. If you agree to write a letter with your own blood, in which you declare that you unite yourself with me and you deny your faith, I will give you all the pleasures this world has to offer, and I will fulfill all your bodily desires. You will live in such luxury and comfort, that there will be no one else like you."

Blinded by the passion of hedonism, the poor man agreed to the devil's proposal, and he composed a letter in which he formally denied his baptism. That is, he renounced Christ and united himself with the devil. From that moment, the devil never left his side, but continuously accompanied him in the form of a soldier (as he had originally appeared to him), and provided him with temporary pleasures and material goods as he had promised.

One day, as this poor man was passing by a church, he turned his eyes towards it and caught a glimpse of an icon of the Theotokos. This prompted him to bring his sins to mind, and as he thought of all his improprieties, he let out a heavy sigh with pain of heart. When the devil, who was following him, noticed this, he gave the man such a blow that knocked the wind out of him. When the man came to his senses, the devil warned him: "Listen up! Never dare to even look at another icon of the Virgin Mary again. For she has done me great harm, and she has snatched many souls from my hands. If I see you turning your eyes to her again, I will give you a miserable death. Not only will you be deprived prematurely of all the pleasures of this life, but I will also take you to eternal hell." Upon hearing these things, the pathetic man became distraught—not so much for the bodily harm he would suffer, but rather for the spiritual death his soul would succumb to. Contemplating how he could possibly be delivered from this captivity, he reasoned: "The enemy himself confessed that the Theotokos took

many souls from his hands. Perhaps her grace will also have mercy on me. After all, she is the Mother of the All-Merciful God." The devil, unable to gauge all these thoughts that Carlos was pondering in his heart, decided to lead him by another church to see whether or not he would obey his order. The church they came across happened to have its doors open at that moment. Noticing this, Carlos straight away darted into the church, and upon entering he fell to the ground before the icon of the Mother of God, beating his chest, and crying out from the depth of his heart: "Queen and Protectress of the World, quickly deliver me from the hands of the devil. Your power is great, O Commander; show it also towards me, the thrice wretched. Your mercy is boundless; have mercy on me, the pathetic and unworthy one." As he cried out these and many other similar words with groans and copious tears, the devil was in a rage and causing much commotion outside of the church. After a considerable length of time, the devil shouted: "I am leaving, you faithless scoundrel, because the power of the Virgin is expelling me. But I still have your written confession, and when her Son comes as a righteous Judge, He will hand you over to me, because you voluntarily denied your faith." After threatening him in this manner, the evil one vanished.

Meanwhile, Carlos continued his supplication at length with tears and sighs, begging for mercy from the Mother of the All-Merciful God. He continued to weep bitterly from his heart and utter words full of grief and pain for three consecutive days and nights. Eventually, tired from the prolonged effort and excessive wailing he fell into a light sleep and had the following vision: He saw the Most Holy Theotokos rebuking him: "You denied my Son" she said. "So, what do you want now in my house?" To this, he answered tearfully in a humble voice: "O most glorious and merciful Mother: for whom was your All-Merciful Son crucified? Was it not for sinners? Although I committed a huge crime, I take courage from the example of the thief, the harlot, the prodigal son, and many others. God, through His boundless mercy, accepted and forgave them at a time when they did not have you as their intercessor and advocate. He did not refuse to impart His compassion and forgiveness to them. How then will He refuse to accept me—especially now that I have you as my bold intercessor? Have pity on me, my Lady Theotokos. Your Son and God will unquestionably give you anything you ask for, because He appointed you as the intercessor of sinners." The Mother of God then responded to him: "Because you have despised your lawlessness, and you have repented with all your heart, I accept you and will reconcile you with my Son. Be careful henceforth not to be ungrateful for this

immense gift, but, rather, to carry out works worthy of repentance." He, in turn, thanked her at length, and added: "My Lady Theotokos and unrivaled Protectress, you are capable of all things. Therefore, do me one more favor, as confirmation of my forgiveness. Command that the enemy returns to me my written denial, so that he can no longer threaten to use it against me on the Day of Judgment, and so that I may henceforth live without this fear. I know that nothing is impossible for you—for you are the Mother of the All-Powerful God. Please take hold of that accursed letter, so that the evil one becomes completely humbled and no longer hope to use it against me." The Theotokos then responded: "May this happen for you, unto the glory of my Son."

After she blessed him in this way, it seemed that he heard voices in the air, pleading: "O Lady, as the Mother of righteousness, do not commit this injustice. Do not take from me the one who confessed in writing that he is mine." She then replied: "Enemy of the truth! You are always a liar, but this time you spoke the truth. I *am* the Mother of righteousness! And that is precisely why I execute righteous judgment by taking my Son's creation from your hands. For it is unjust for you to hold authority over that which belongs to God."

After Carlos witnessed all these things, on account of his great joy he awoke, to unexpectedly find the actual document in his hands! Seeing this miracle, his happiness was inexpressible. Everyone who subsequently learned of this miracle was shocked and simultaneously marveled at the Lord's boundless mercy, and the unrivaled power of the All-Hymned Virgin. It was not long before the news of this event spread to the neighboring cities and regions. When the Venerable Leo, who was Archbishop of Rome at the time (461 A.D.), heard about this, he sent messengers to Carlos requesting his presence. After the Archbishop spoke with Carlos and furthermore saw the letter, he declared that the Church hold a common feast of thanksgiving to the Mother of God. This became the cause for many who were subject to various forms of lawlessness and wallowing in lewd behavior to repent wholeheartedly, and to hope that they too would obtain forgiveness of their sins through the prayers of the Most-Holy Theotokos.

As for Carlos, he became a monk and proceeded to blossom fruits worthy of repentance, as the Mother of God commanded him. And with her help, he departed in peace from this present life to the blessed life in heaven. May we all be deemed worthy of it, through her intercessions, and the intercessions of all the saints. Amen.