

# SAINT NICHOLAS THE FORMER SOLDIER

—who is commemorated on December 24th—

When king Nikiforos, who reigned between 802-811 AD, summoned his armed forces together and sent them to battle the Bulgarians, our holy father Nicholas, who was enlisted in the Roman army at the time, also set off on the campaign with the battalions. As they were traveling through one particular region, dusk fell upon them before they could reach their intended destination. Forced to stop, Nicholas found an inn to spend the night. After having dinner with the innkeeper, he said his evening prayers and went to sleep.

Sometime around midnight, the innkeeper's daughter, overcome by satanic lust, quietly made her way to the room where Nicholas was sleeping; she nudged him and began enticing him to sin. Startled by the unexpected visitor, the Saint said to her: "Cease from your illicit and satanic desire! Do you wish to defile your purity and send me to the depths of Hades?" The young lady left, but returned shortly thereafter and began to tempt the righteous man once more. The Saint sent her away a second time, after he censured and reprimanded her firmly. She withdrew once more only to return a third time, intoxicated with lust. At that point, the Saint upbraided her harshly: "You wretched and utterly shameless woman! Don't you realize that the demons want to corrupt your virginity, make a mockery out of you, and ultimately send your soul to hell? Don't you realize that I—the lowly one—am journeying with God's help to a foreign and barbaric nation, to encounter war and bloodshed? How can I defile my body the very moment I am going off to war?" Having directed these and other such similar reproving words to the young lady, the righteous man arose, and after he finished his morning prayers, he went to the call of duty.

The following night, Nicholas had a dream. He saw himself standing on top of a towering prominence. Next to him, there was a Judge seated on a throne, with his right foot resting upon his left foot. "Do you see the Roman army on one side and the Bulgarian army on the other side?" asked the Judge. "Yes, Lord," replied Nicholas. "I see the Romans slaying and defeating the Bulgarians." Then the Judge said to the righteous man: "Look at me carefully." When Nicholas turned and fixed his gaze upon Him, he noticed that the Judge's right foot was touching the ground, and his left foot was now placed upon his right. Then, he turned to the battlefield and witnessed that the Bulgarian army began to slay the

Romans. When all the killing had stopped and the war came to an end, the Judge said to the righteous man: “Carefully examine the fields containing the slain corpses and tell me what you see.” When Nicholas proceeded to inspect the battleground thoroughly, he saw that the entire land was filled with the dead bodies of the slain Roman soldiers. Amongst these bodies, he noticed an untouched, green plot of land, that was about the size of an adult bed.

“Whom do you think this plot belongs to?” asked the awesome Judge. Nicholas replied: “I am an unlearned and uneducated man, Oh Master, and I do not know.” Then the fearsome Judge answered once more: “The gravesite you are looking at belonged to you, and you were also destined to lay in it along with your fellow soldiers who were killed. However, because during the previous night you bravely repelled and overcame the three-headed serpent, (that is, the lady who assaulted you three times inviting you to obscene action), you single-handedly saved yourself from slaughter and death—both your soul and your body. If you serve Me faithfully, spiritual death will not conquer you either.”

Having seen these things, the righteous man awoke filled with fear. After arising from bed and thanking God from the depth of his soul, he quickly set out back toward the direction of his homeland from where he had departed. Having journeyed for a day, he took refuge on the top of a mountain, where he prayed peacefully to God on behalf of the Roman army. Thereafter, the following events took place.

The Bulgarian king fled to the city of Klisoria, which prompted most of the Bulgarian forces to retreat as well to the neighboring mountain ranges, leaving the rest of the land to be guarded by only fifteen-thousand soldiers, all of whom the Romans slaughtered. On account of their victory, however, the Romans became overconfident, prideful, and careless. Consequently, during one of the following nights, as the entire Roman army was sleeping unconcerned and without keeping guard, the Bulgarians launched a surprise attack on them, slaying almost all their men by the sword, including king Nikiforos. When the righteous Nicholas heard of this, he remembered the vision he had seen, he thanked God for preserving him, and returned to his home weeping and lamenting. Later, he entered a Monastery where he received the angelic schema, and after serving God faithfully for many years, he became a discerning and exceptional monastic father. Through his prayers, may Christ our God save us as well.