

SAINT LONGINUS THE CENTURION

— Commemorated October 16th —

The holy martyr Longinus was of Jewish descent and was a centurion¹ serving Pontius Pilate. On holy and great Friday, when our Lord Jesus Christ, out of infinite compassion, was voluntarily crucified in order to save the human race, Longinus and his soldiers were ordered by Pilot to guard the body of Jesus.

Standing next to the Cross, when blessed Longinus witnessed the many signs and miracles that took place (i.e. the eclipse of the sun, the opening of the graves, and deceased people arising from the dead), he exclaimed, **“Truly, this is the Son of God!” (Mt. 27:54)**. Having come to know the truth, he professed this without fear to the synagogue of the Jews saying, **“Jesus was truly the Son of God.”** Shortly thereafter, when they buried the life-giving body of Jesus, Pilot ordered Longinus and his soldiers to guard the tomb as well.

While guarding the grave, Longinus witnessed more miraculous events. Thus, after the Savior’s Resurrection, Longinus and his soldiers went to the synagogue of the Jews and related to them everything that had occurred: the earthquake, the brilliant Angel who pushed the large rock from the entrance of the tomb, that Jesus Christ truly resurrected from the dead, and that the only thing remaining in the tomb were the linen cloths. When the Jewish leaders heard this, they gave a good amount of silver to the soldiers to defame Christ’s Resurrection, asking them to spread the lie that the Apostles secretly went and stole the body at night. Many of the soldiers went to Pilate and conveyed this fabrication; however, the faithful Longinus did not accept even one piece of silver. On the contrary, freely, and with boldness he began to preach the truth: that Christ is true God, and that He resurrected from the dead.

When Pilate and the Jewish leaders learned of this, they despised Longinus, and they began looking for an opportune moment to assassinate him. When Longinus was informed of this by one of his close friends, he decided to give up his military belt and cloak, to deny his family and friends, and taking with him two soldiers who also believed in Christ, he travelled to Cappadocia where he preached, as another Apostle, the extraordinary marvelous events surrounding the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

¹ A centurion was the commander of one hundred soldiers in the ancient Roman army.

The news of Longinus' preaching quickly spread throughout the entire region, and even to Judaea. When the Jews heard of this, they went to Pilate and asked him to write a letter to Caesar Tiberius, accusing Longinus of: i) abandoning his military post; ii) renouncing the faith of the idols; iii) preaching one man, Jesus Christ, as an eternal king; and iv) making most of the Cappadocians believe in Christ. Along with the letter, the Jews also sent plenty of silver, to more easily persuade the emperor to condemn Longinus to death, which indeed is what happened. When Pilate received the emperor's ruling, he sent two soldiers to Cappadocia to execute him. Upon arriving into that region, the soldiers decided to make their way into a certain nearby city. Longinus happened to be living on the outskirts of that city on a small parcel of land. When the soldiers saw him, they asked him confidentially if he knew of where a certain centurion named Longinus lived. The soldiers wanted to apprehend him unexpectedly and wanted to avoid him finding out, lest he try to flee from them.

Blessed Longinus, realized from the grace of the Holy Spirit within him what they wanted, and so he asked them in a kind and compassionate tone: **"Follow me, and I will show you the person you are seeking."** Longinus took his enemies to his home, and as he provided them with a magnificent meal, he asked them why they wanted Longinus. The soldiers, after making him avow that he would say nothing to no one, apprised him of the truth: that Pilate had ordered his death along with the other two soldiers who accompanied him. Having learned of this, Longinus told them, **"Rest for the next two days here in my home, because these three people are coming here in two days. I will hand them over to you without you having to go look for them."** He said this because his other two companions were absent running an errand that day, and he did not want to deprive them of the divine gift of martyrdom. In the meantime, Longinus provided exceptional hospitality to his soon-to-be executioners, serving them for the next two days as if they were his beloved masters.

When Longinus saw that his two companions were approaching his home, he said to the visiting soldiers: **"My dear friends, you should know that I am Longinus who you seek."** Upon hearing this, the two soldiers were dumbfounded. Seeing that Longinus was pleasant and unworried, they initially did not believe him. Afterwards, however, when they verified that he indeed was Longinus, a horrific pain pierced their souls. They sighed heavily, and their conscience began to prick them harshly as they recalled all the love he had

shown them, for which they would now repay with evil. Then they began saying the following with distress: **“O friend Longinus! Why did you engage in such an undertaking? To receive your executors in your own home, and to have your hospitality become the cause of your death? Go, dear man, go in peace! May your life be granted to you as repayment for your gracious hospitality. We are afraid to place the sword on your neck... We would rather run the risk of being punished by Pilate than defiling our conscience by repaying you with such ingratitude.”**

This is what the soldiers were saying as they sympathized dearly with the saint. He in turn told them, **“Do not be sad, my friends, but be consoled. For this end to my life will turn into eternal bliss for me. It will deem me worthy of being in Heaven forever with my Master Jesus Christ, Who is the True God, just as all of creation attested during His crucifixion: the sun hid its rays, the earth quaked, the rocks were rent... how then can I deny Him?”** As the saint said these and other such words to convince the soldiers to carry out their order, his two companions arrived, whom Longinus embraced and greeted saying: **“Rejoice, O soldiers and heirs of Christ’s Kingdom!”**

Having said this, Longinus wore his best clothes as if he was preparing to attend a wedding, and then he and his two companions knelt and were beheaded on the sixteenth day of October. The two soldiers proceeded to take Longinus’ head and brought it back to Pilate, as confirmation that they had truly beheaded him. Pilate in turn ordered that they throw Longinus’ venerable head somewhere outside the city. The Lord, however, for Whom this head was severed, preserved it whole and unharmed within the dung pile it had been tossed. Not only did the Lord carry out this sign, but He worked an even greater one with the venerable head of His Martyr Longinus.

In those days there was a blind widow, who had only one son. This boy was the only consolation and hope for his blind and widowed mother. This lady had great reverence for God and tremendous faith in Christ. Thus, she took her son and went to Jerusalem to venerate the Lord’s Holy Sepulcher, hoping that Christ would restore her vision through a miracle. When she arrived in the Holy Land, she took soil from the ground and placed it on her eyes with reverence. However, not only did she not receive her sight, but unexpectedly her son became ill, his condition rapidly deteriorated, and he quickly passed away.

The poor widow wept inconsolably on account of these three unbearable hardships that had befallen her. Addressing the Lord, she said: **“Why, my Lord, have you completely forsaken me? Am I the only person who has sinned and am I the only person who deserves to be punished in this manner? You have taken my only son, who served as the light for my eyes. What hope for salvation or consolation do I now have?... O my sweetest child! You comforted me in my blindness. What am I to become now, the unfortunate one? How can I live without you?”**

Having said these and many other similar things, the poor widow fell asleep, at which time the saint appeared to her and said, **“I am Longinus the Centurion. My head was cut off for Christ, and after bringing it here, they threw it in a dunghill outside the city. Go, therefore, to that location, dig deep into the dung pile, and you will uncover my head. Take it and touch it to your eyes, and you will receive your sight. And then I will also show you your son, so you can see how much glory he has, and you will find great consolation in your adversities.”**

After having this vision, the blind widow found someone to guide her, and with much effort they found the aforementioned spot outside the city. The widow then immediately began to dig through the manure with her bare hands, and in a short while she discovered the precious treasure. As soon as she took the venerable head in her hands, her vision was instantly restored. She began to kiss it and wet it with copious tears, and upon returning to where she was lodging, she proceeded to wash it carefully and anoint it with myrrh.

The following night, Saint Longinus appeared to her again in a dream. This time the saint was holding her son in his arms, as if he was his own son. The boy was dressed in luxurious and splendid garments and looked extremely delighted. Thereafter the Saint said to the lady, **“Look at your son, whom you were lamenting. Look at how much happiness he has found. Therefore, do not be sad. Rather, you should rejoice, because God has deemed him worthy of His Heavenly Kingdom, and He has granted him to me as a companion, and he will never part from me. Thus, take my head and your son’s remains, and bury both of them in one grave. And thank the Lord Who granted him rest within so much glory and eternal bliss.”**

Having seen this and heard the saint's instructions, this lady transferred Saint Longinus' head and her son's remains to her homeland Cappadocia, to a village called Sandali. There, she built a chapel dedicated to Saint Longinus, and she deposited the martyr's venerable head within it, thus providing a source of healing for all who came to the saint seeking his intercessions. And with endless feelings of gratitude she would say to God: "Now I have come to know how many blessings come upon them who love the Lord! I was seeking to receive physical eyes, and I received physical and spiritual eyes. I was grieved by the loss of my son, but I saw him enveloped in unimaginable glory, a co-heir of the saints, standing next to God. I saw him dwelling amongst the prophets, the martyrs, and Longinus the Centurion, dressed in brilliant garments and chanting together, "Truly this is the Son of God!"

To Him is due all glory unto the Ages. Amen.