



St Nicholas News

7
31.XII.2010

Communications to the Saint Nicholas' Friends

From Fr. Gerardo Cioffari, o.p. director of the

CENTRO STUDI NICOLAIANI

Bari (Italy)

ORTHODOX PILGRIMS FEASTING ST NICHOLAS DAY IN BARI

The **19th of December** (6th December according to the old liturgical Calendar) there has been the great **Orthodox feast of St Nicholas** in the Catholic Pontifical Basilica in **Bari**. The Dominican Fathers every year the 19th of December give the Russian Pilgrims the run of the Basilica. In this day, in fact, they come more and more numerous. The generosity of the Fathers is made easier thanks to the 13 days of difference between the Russian Julian and the catholic Gregorian calendars).

This year, however, emerged a great difficulty, because the 19th was a Sunday. With the agreement of the **Papal Delegate, the Archbishop of Bari Francesco Cacucci**, the Dominican Fathers have decided to celebrate all the morning masses (7,30; 9,00; 10,30; 12,00 and 13,00) in the nearby Church of St Gregory, so to permit the Orthodox Pilgrims to celebrate in a complete freedom.

Thousands of pilgrims came from all over **Russia** (together with **Ukraina** and **Bjelorussia**), as well as from **Moldavia, Rumania** and **Georgia**. Among other news, my Russian friend Michail Talalay (I was down in bed with the flu) told me that this year there were pilgrims from Greece too. He told me also that the Divine Liturgy was celebrated by **metropolitan Vladimir, head of**

the **autocephalous Ukrainian Church** (in communion with Moscow). With him celebrated also **Aleksej, bishop of Kostroma**, and 40 orthodox priests. The difficult task of keeping order in the Church was taken by the rector of the Russian Church of St Nicholas in Bari, father **Vladimir Kučumov**.

GREEK PILGRIMS TOO ? A NEW HOPE

If mister Talalay's communication was correct, this year there were Greek pilgrims together with Slavs, Rumanians, Moldavians and Georgians. This would mean that something is beginning to change. In fact, with few exceptions from some churches and monasteries that prefer to remain "anonymous", **Greek pilgrimages are very rare** and only passing through.

One reason for this is that Greek Orthodox are too **sensible to the fact that the Basilica is a Roman-Catholic Church** (for them Catholics are heretics and the validity of their sacraments is questionable). A further reason is that they feel **St Nicholas as being stolen to them** (neglecting the fact that Myra and its region in 1087 was under Turkish plunders). Therefore, while **Russians** expressed and **express their joy** for the Barians saving St Nicholas relics from Muslims (by instituting in the year 1095 the feast of the Translation: 9th of Mai) **the Greeks** kept and **keep** themselves **silent** (somewhere a feast of the

Translation is celebrated, but without mentioning Bari). Only after Nikodimos the Hagiorite, who narrated the facts borrowing the news from the Kievan legend, the Greeks have remembered about Bari and St. Nicholas relics.

But, the **anti-Catholic feelings are stronger than love toward St Nicholas**, therefore they alter completely the truth. Some of them affirm that the **Pope sold the relics to Russians**; Russians from Kiev sold to Rumanians and other ridiculous stories; while others, less inclined to lies and falsities prefer throwing doubts on the presence of the relics in Bari (because Venice and St Nicolas de Port claim to have relics too).

According to Athanasios Chatzis (Εκδόσεις Ενθεος Βιος 2007, p. 42) “**Saint Nicholas did not like to be celebrated by Popish priests**, but only by Orthodox priests. When two catholic priests went to celebrate close to the relics, they remained speechless”. According Alexios Panagopoulos (Ο Άγιος των θαλασσων Νικολαος, Αθηναί 2000, p. 62), because **no myron-manna was coming out when Latin priests celebrated**, they used to call an Orthodox priest in order that the myron would pour again (communication by br. Vincenzo Marrulli). A Dominican father living in Athens, Fr. Rosario Scognamiglio, tells me that the situation is slowly improving. Several books (for example: Κατερινα Τσιμουρη, Νικολαος ο αγιος των θαλασσων, Ακριτας Παιδικα, Αθηνα 2007, p. 15) speak about the relics in Bari without adding false, strange and imaginative explanations.

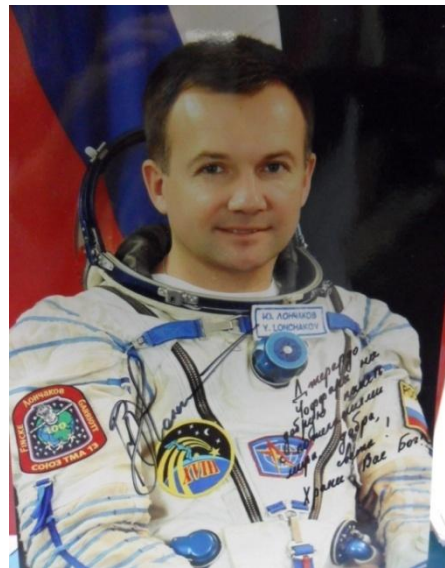
It is our hope, therefore, that the Greek Orthodox, **following Patriarch Athenagoras’ steps**, shall feel in communion with the Roman Catholics, in spite of some details that have no deep impact in Christian life. And in this spirit they will come to Bari with the same joy with which the Russians do.

The particle from the wooden case in which Barian sailors brought to Bari St Nicholas bones ►

**HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL ST NICHOLAS FRIENDS**

THE RELIC OF ST NICHOLAS BACK FROM THE SPACE

December 12th the Astronaut Commander Jurij Lončakov together with the chaplain of Star City, Igumen Iov, has delivered to Fr. Damiano Bova, rector of the Basilica of St Nicholas, the particle of the wooden case in which the Barian sailors in 1087 brought St Nicholas’ bones from Myra (Turkey).



Commander Jurij Valentinovič Lončakov

The relic was in the space with the flight “Sojuz TMA-19” commanded by Fjodor Jurčichin together with the NASA spacemen Douglas Willock and Shannon Walker for 163 days (Bajkonur 16th June – Arkalyk 26th November 2010). **Half particle is venerated in the chapel of Transfiguration in Star City** (the Russian Citadel of the Astronauts). The second half shall be exhibited in **Chapel of the Relics in St Nicholas’ Basilica in Bari**. May these spacerelics push St Nicholas to give a closer look to his faithful.

