



## St. Nicholas Planas

March 2nd

Saint Nicolas Planas was born of devout parents in 1851, on the island of Naxos. From his very earliest years, he was distinguished by his simplicity and piety; he gave away the bread that his mother gave him to the poor in the village, and even gave his clothing to needy children. Throughout his life, he never kept for himself anything that would be for his personal satisfaction or comfort. He married at the age of seventeen and had a son, but his wife did not understand his spiritual aspirations, and continually re-

proached him. Becoming a widower after several years, he entrusted his son to his parents and, having given the whole family inheritance to a fellow-countryman who was crippled by debt, was able thenceforward to consecrate himself entirely to the Lord's service and, in the middle of Athens, lead the life of the desert ascetics. Ordained priest in 1884, he was soon driven out of the Church of Saint Panteleimon, to which he had been attached, and settled in a small church called St John the Hunter: a parish comprising only eight families, from which he received scarcely any stipend.

Humble and lacking any education, Father Nicolas nevertheless became the most popular priest in Athens. For fifty-two years, he celebrated the Divine Liturgy every day in various of the city's churches, and most often in half-ruined country chapels. And what a Liturgy! Having identified his existence with the life of the Church, it was unthinkable to him to offer the Bloodless Sacrifice without accompanying it with all the ecclesiastical Offices as they are celebrated in the strictest monasteries. He began at about eight o'clock in the morning in order to end by two or three o'clock in the afternoon. During the *Prothesis*, he spent two or three hours commemorating the names of the living and the dead written on thousands of tiny pieces of paper that he had carefully put into bundles and carried everywhere with him. In fact, when anyone gave him names for commemoration with a donation, however small, he remembered them year after year. When he was asked to do so, he celebrated all-night vigils, services of intercession or of Anointing, taking no account of his time or trouble. At the end of his Liturgy, during which he would most often read three or four Gospels, reading slowly and mispronouncing the difficult words without calling forth amusement from those present, he commemorated an interminable list of saints, as though he were not prepared to leave out a single one of the friends of God who were invisibly present. Children and devout souls often saw him levitated above the ground during the Liturgy.

These liturgies of the simple Papa Nicolas were truly initiations into the Mystery, which converted the hardest hearts and drew crowds of the faithful, especially when he celebrated all-night vigils in the Church of the Prophet Elisha, where the two celebrated writers Alexander Papadiamantis and Alexander Moraitidis were singers. Like an angel in the flesh, the holy priest was always ready to officiate, wherever the location, and to pray for all: rich and poor impartially. He never kept the money given to him by the faithful until the evening, but gave it away at once to the needy or devoted it to some ecclesiastical work. He was thus able to rebuild his church, give a dowry to orphan girls and finance the studies of poor students. For his own needs, he was content with a few pence, living on a little bread and herbs he had gathered hither and thither, or a glass of milk offered to him by shepherds. His face being constantly illumined by a childlike smile, it was impossi-

ble for him to make enemies. He forgave those who stole from him, found excuses for those who did him harm or slandered him, and thus passed through all the sorrows of life by the grace of the Comforter who dwelt within him. One thing alone was able to vex him: to be interrupted when at prayer or hindered in celebrating the Lord's service. During that period, western reforming influences were making themselves felt in the Church of Greece, and Metropolitan Meletius Metaxakis forbade the clergy of the capital to celebrate night-vigils. Father Nicolas, in distress, prayed ardently to the Lord for five days, and permission to do so was finally given.

When he went along a road, walking slowly and with difficulty because of his endless standing in church, children went with him, women crossed themselves and men removed their hats and stood respectfully aside to give him room to pass. Taxi drivers squabbled about who should take him, certain that it would be a good day for takings. Strict with himself, Father Nicolas was full of tenderness towards the faithful who came to Confession, to find with him the comfort of the heavenly Father. He had insight into the depths of souls and foresaw the future. One day, a woman gave him a *prosphora*\* to use for the Divine Liturgy but the Saint refused it, saying: 'I cannot accept it while you are co-habiting without being married.' On another occasion, he drank a bottle of arsenic believing that it was Communion wine, but, protected by divine grace, he suffered no ill-effects.

A model of an Orthodox celebrant of the Divine Liturgy – a man whose being and Holy Tradition have become one and the same – a shepherd of the simple and humble, Father Nicolas had so greatly acquired among the people the authority of a new Apostle that, when he gave his soul into God's hands after a short illness on 2 March 1932, with a smile on his lips, a crowd beyond counting came to venerate his mortal remains for three whole days.