



## St. Nikephoros — June 2nd

St. Nikephoros was born in 758, the son of Theodore, a well-placed government official, and Eudokia, a woman whose noble birth guaranteed her an influence that brought every advantage to her and her family. The son's training was complete and he entered the service of an emperor with whom he shared the name of Nikephoros, ultimately becoming imperial secretary. The life of pomp and privilege held no appeal for Nikephoros, who for many years had shown religious leanings, and no one was really surprised when he resigned to follow the King of Kings.

Nikephoros entered a monastery in Propontis in the province of Marmara, where he found happiness in serving the Messiah as a humble

but extremely active monk. Far afield of the clamorous court, he established himself as a man of God whose compassion and understanding earned him a respect he could never have attained as secretary to the emperor, in addition to the great personal satisfaction from serving a higher authority. Nevertheless, his prior service in the court served him in good stead, for when he was proposed to be appointed to the patriarchal see, left vacant at the death of Tarasios, his name was quite familiar to those in power. Installed as ecumenical patriarch of Constantinople, he was acclaimed by the multitudes and settled into the office in an atmosphere of complete accord. His tenure was so serene as to be almost uneventful, except for the Iconoclastic movement to which he was opposed and would have discredited had it been left to him alone to handle.

With the ascendancy of the Emperor Leo V to the Byzantine throne, the issue of the holy icons, which had scarred the Christian body for nearly one hundred fifty years, was revived by the new emperor, who came to power as an avowed iconoclast. Leo lost no time in calling for the elimination of the icons in houses of worship, the more so perhaps because saints and not kings were represented in churches for veneration – not worship. The emperor's chief antagonist was the iconophile Patriarch Nikephoros, who saw no reason to bow to a sovereign when it seemed to conflict with the divine will. He considered it more an obedience to the will of God than a disobedience to the king, who was not too familiar with sacred dogma as set forth by the Church Fathers.

Nikephoros refused to submit to the emperor, claiming prior authority over matters of church dogma, but his position was hopeless and the venerable prelate was ordered into exile by the unyielding emperor, whose shabby display of royal power earned him nothing but contempt, particularly when he replaced the banished cleric with an iconoclast of his own choice, Theodotos I. In 813, Nikephoros was forced to leave Constantinople for having had the courage to defy the emperor in defense of the holy canons of the Church, which specify that icons are an integral part of Orthodox worship.

Dishonored in the minds of the royal household but not in the hearts of the multitudes who venerated him still, Nikephoros lived in solitary exile, refusing the help of friends who would have been punished for aiding him. He died after thirteen years of ignominious banishment.

The iconophiles' inevitable victory came about nineteen years after his death and the then reigning Emperor Michael and his mother, Empress Theodora, both sympathetic to the iconophiles, issued a proclamation restoring all honors to Nikephoros and ordered that his remains be brought back from near oblivion to rest in honored glory in the city which he so gallantly served as patriarch. With the emperor and his mother in attendance, Nikephoros was ceremoniously interred at the Church of the Holy Apostles on March 13, 843.