# St. Theodore the General

## February 8th

The Great Martyr Theodore Stratelates came from the city of Euchaita in Asia Minor. He was endowed with many talents, and was handsome in appearance. For his charity God enlightened him with the knowledge of Christian truth. The bravery of the saintly soldier was revealed after he, with the help of God, killed a giant serpent living on a precipice in the outskirts of Euchaita. The serpent had devoured many people and animals, terrorizing the countryside. St Theodore armed himself with a sword and vanquished it, glorifying the name of Christ among the people.

For his bravery St Theodore was appointed military commander [stratelatos] in the city of Heraclea, where he combined his military service with preaching the Gospel among the pagans subject to him. His gift of persuasion, reinforced by his personal example of Christian life, turned many from their false gods. Soon, nearly all of Heraclea had accepted Christianity.

During this time the emperor Licinius (311-324) began a fierce persecution against Christians. In an effort to stamp out the new faith, he persecuted the enlightened adherents of Christianity, who were perceived as a threat to paganism. Among these was St Theodore. Licinius tried to force St Theodore to offer sacrifice to the pagan gods. The saint invited Licinius to come to him with his idols so both of them could offer sacrifice before the people.

Blinded by his hatred for Christianity, Licinius trusted the words of the saint, but he was disappointed. St Theodore smashed the gold and silver statues into pieces, which he then distributed to the poor. Thus he demonstrated the vain faith in soulless idols, and also displayed Christian charity.

St Theodore was arrested and subjected to fierce and refined torture. He was dragged on the ground, beaten with iron rods, had his body pierced with sharp spikes, was burned with fire, and his eyes were plucked out. Finally, he was crucified. Varus, the servant of St Theodore, barely had the strength to write down the incredible torments of his master.

God, however, in His great mercy, willed that the death of St Theodore should be as fruitful for those near him as his life was. An angel healed the saint's wounded body and took him down from the cross. In the morning, the imperial soldiers found him alive and unharmed. Seeing with their own eyes the infinite might of the Christian God, they were baptized not far from the place of the unsuccessful execution.

Thus St Theodore became "like a day of splendor" for those pagans dwelling in the darkness of idolatary, and he enlightened their souls "with the bright rays of his suffering." Unwilling to escape martyrdom for Christ, St Theodore voluntarily surrendered himself to Licinius, and discouraged the Christians from rising up against the torturer, saying, "Beloved, halt! My Lord Jesus Christ, hanging upon the Cross, restrained the angels and did not permit them to take revenge on the race of man."

Going to execution, the holy martyr opened up the prison doors with just a word and freed the prisoners from their bonds. People who touched his robe were healed instantly from sicknesses, and freed from demonic possession. By order of the emperor, St Theodore was beheaded by the sword. Before his death he told Varus, " Do not fail to record the day of my death, and bury my body in Euchaita." He also asked to be remembered each year on this date. Then he bent his neck beneath the sword, and received the crown of martyrdom which he had sought. This occurred on February 8, 319, on a Saturday, at the third hour of the day.

St Theodore is regarded as the patron saint of soldiers. He is also commemorated on June 8.