



SESSION 9: DIOCLETIAN, SAINT GEORGE, DONATISM & CONSTANTINE – READINGS

“But increasing freedom transformed our character to arrogance and sloth; we began envying and abusing each other, cutting our own throats, as occasion offered, with weapons of sharp-edged words; rulers hurled themselves at rulers and laymen waged party fights against laymen, and unspeakable hypocrisy and dissimulation were carried out to the limit of wickedness... Those of us who were supposed to be pastors cast off the restraining influence of the fear of God and quarreled heatedly with each other, engaged solely in swelling the disputes, threats, envy, and mutual hostility and hate, frantically demanding the despotic power they coveted... Then it was that in accordance with the words of Jeremiah, the Lord in His anger covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud, and cast down from Heaven the glory of Israel... At last, while the gatherings were still crowded, divine judgement, with its wonted mercy, gently and gradually began to order things its own way, and with the Christians in the army persecutions began.”

-Eusebius, The History of the Church, p. 257

“Of all the gods he respected most Apollo, who was supposed to be a foreteller of the future... Once Diocletian Asked Apollo about a certain matter. But the devil answered him: “I cannot tell the truth about the future for the righteous are hindering me... The righteous are destroying our power. Diocletian then asked the heathen priests who the righteous were who were preventing Apollo from prophesying. The priests replied that on earth the righteous were called Christians. Hearing this, Diocletian was filled with anger and fury against the Christians and renewed the persecutions which had been in abeyance... Then the Emperor called for his governors and consuls from all over the empire for a council in Nicomedia; he gathered the princes, lords and all his senate and, revealing to them his fury towards the Christians... After several speeches by those present at the council, the tyrant announced that there was nothing more honorable and necessary than the worship of the ancient ancestral gods... All received the Emperor’s announcement enthusiastically. Diocletian and the senate met again a second and third time to discuss the eradication of Christianity...”

-St. Nectarios Press, The Great Martyr Saint George, p. 2

“On the third day, which was the day on which the Emperor and his officials had to meet for the last time to make the final decision about the death of the innocent Christians, the brave warrior of Christ, Saint George, abandoning all fear of man and only having within him the fear of God, with a bright face and courageous mind, appeared at that iniquitous and godless gathering and addressed himself to the Emperor in these words: O Emperor, and you, lords and counselors! You are appointed to maintain good laws and just tribunals, but you are furiously directing your anger against the Christians, supporting crime and issuing wrong orders concerning the judging of people who have wronged no one. You are persecuting and torturing them and forcing into your senseless impiety those who have learned to be pious. But no, your idols are not gods. Do not be deceived by this lie. Jesus Christ is the only God, the only Lord in the glory of God the Father by Whom everything has been created, and

everything exists by His Holy Spirit. Either recognize the truth and learn piety, or else do not confuse with your insanity those who have learnt to know the true religion.”

-St. Nectarios Press, The Great Martyr Saint George, p. 2

“I was in these places, and saw many of the executions for myself. Some of the victims suffered death by beheading, others punishment by fire. So many were killed in a single day that the axe, blunted and worn out by slaughter, was broken in pieces, while the exhausted executioners had to be periodically relieved. All the time I observed a most wonderful eagerness and a truly divine power and enthusiasm in those who had put their trust in the Christ of God. No sooner had the first batch been sentenced, than others from every side would jump on to the platform in front of the judge and proclaim themselves Christians. They paid no heed to torture in all its terrifying forms, but undaunted spoke boldly of their devotion to the God of the universe and with joy, laughter, and gaiety received the final sentence of death; they sang and sent up hymns of thanksgiving to the God of the universe till their very last breath.”

-Eusebius, The History of the Church, p. 265

“But why need I tell a long story, piling up examples of the victories won by devoted martyrs all over the world, especially those who were attacked not under common law but as enemies in war? For example a little Christian town in Phrygia was encircled by legionaries, who set it on fire and completely destroyed it, along with the entire population – men, women, and children – as they called on Almighty God. And why? Because all of the inhabitants of the town without exception – the Mayor himself and the magistrates, with all the officials and the whole populace – declared themselves Christians and absolutely refused to obey the command to commit idolatry.”

Eusebius, The History of the Church, p. 268