

**Andrew of Crete**

**Oration 18 – Encomium on St Nicholas of Myra<sup>1</sup>**

**BHG 1362 / CPG 8187**

---

<sup>1</sup> This translation was commissioned by Roger Pearse in 2015 and kindly made for us by Dr Jaakko Olkinuora of the University of Eastern Finland. The translation is placed in the public domain. The critical edition used is that of G. Anrich, *Hagios Nikolaos*, 2 vols, 1913-17, vol.1, pp.419-428, based on seven manuscripts. An older text is given in PG 97, 1192-1205, with Latin translation, where it is listed as “Oration 18” by Andrew of Crete. Anrich questions whether the text is indeed an authentic work of Andrew of Crete. It dates to the early 8<sup>th</sup> century.

# **Encomium of Andrew, Archbishop of Crete, to our holy father Nicholas**

Translated by Jaakko Olkinuora

O man of God, faithful servant and steward of Christ's mysteries, and man desiring the things of the Spirit! Receive the sermon we deliver to you as a gift, and consider it our gratitude in return for grace for the miraculous and ardent help you have shown toward us. Indeed, we call you the pillar and foundation of the Church and the illuminator of the world, who maintains the word of life. Virtue has made your names many, and no good thing has escaped you, O you most good shepherd and most praiseworthy high-priest Nicholas! You have stowed away the most precious of virtues in your blessed soul like a treasure of gold and jewels, therefore becoming renowned in the entire world. For a lamp, set on a high and gilded lamp-stand, does not illuminate the blindness of the night as much as you do of late, being set on the throne of a high-priest by Christ, the True Light. As in a dry place, a dark space of the world, you light, like a torch-carrier, all your flock towards the nightless light, and as if from a high observation point you illuminate not only those who are close, but also those who stand far away, with the unwavering brightness of knowledge in Spirit. The angelic way of life has truly made you sublime; the pure and contemplative [quality] of true mingling with the Divine prepared you to fly above, near the heavenly arches. From this very place, the many kinds of virtues are assembled through practical philosophy<sup>2</sup> by you, who selectively gather the lifestyles of the saints like a bee and, from them, bring together the first-fruits of virtues.

For which of the saints have you not zealously imitated, O father? Or whose footsteps have you not followed exceedingly? Or, better put, which of those who lived in virtue have you not striven to resemble? The righteous Abel was praised for his deeds: you yourself, O most righteous father, have dedicated yourself wholly and completely to God as a rational offering. Enos put his hope in the Lord: you yourself have already received visible proofs for the hopes set before us (cf. Hebr. 6:18), while still roaming on earth. Enoch, who pleased God, was transposed [to a heavenly existence]: you yourself have completely transposed the mind of [your] soul from earth to heaven, being wholly dedicated to God, and exchanging things that pass away for permanent ones. The righteous Noah's sacrifices were truly accepted, because he saved the races of irrational animals with the wooden ark, when a cataclysm had covered the earth. You yourself carry to God mystical adoration as offerings and spiritual sacrifices, showing that the Church of Christ is another ark that saves human generations, just like the various animal species, through the accuracy of your words

---

<sup>2</sup> I.e. asceticism.

when the Arian heresy had flooded [the world]. Abraham is wondered at for his hospitality and his love for God. Likewise, he is blessed for carrying the son born out of [divine] promise as an acceptable sacrifice to God, without sacrificing him: you yourself lead [your people] by consuming Christ himself and distribute [the offerings] of the spiritual sacrificial table to those who are present. You do not sacrifice your beloved son or a lamb that was brought instead of him, but you have behaved yourself entirely like a burnt offering for all and, following the Gospel, you send forth your own soul for the lambs. Isaac is glorified for his righteousness: you yourself run about everywhere in Spirit as a kind of standard of righteousness; with great courage, you stop those who deliberately do wrong, appearing clearly in dream to sleeping kings. Jacob was famous for his simple lifestyle and abundance of children; he also beheld the ladder that reached heaven, thus depicting beforehand the image of a greater mystery: you yourself have “given birth” to patriarchs, shepherds and flocks for the sake of the arch-shepherd, Christ, who also entrusted you [your] flock. Also, you did not fail to plan to ascend in your heart, being transfigured step by step, from glory to glory, ascending from earth to heaven in contemplation. Job was exceedingly famous for his innocence and steadfastness in sufferings: you yourself have striven at imitating him, when you did not fall down by giving up to the attacks of heresies, but rather were fixed like a tower that breaks the waves, as if protecting a treasure. Joseph was renowned for his prudence and gratuitous distribution of wheat: you yourself have wholly become an image of prudence, and you have done the business by distributing wheat within the eparchy of Lycia, through the teachings of your honey-sweet voice. Moses is hailed for his mildness and [his ability to] rule the people, and God is named as the one leading of [both] Pharaoh and Israel<sup>3</sup>: you yourself, O most blessed father, are, on one hand, mild towards everyone, but, on the other, terrible towards sinners, ordering all the people to abstain from careless deeds, and drowning the rebellions of passions like another Pharaonic power, through the inundation of your virtuous actions. David is noble, and he conquered the arrogant Goliath through the armour of the Spirit: you are even more powerful, since you daily defeat the supernatural tyrant of souls, [another] Goliath,<sup>4</sup> and chase the rapacious wolves of heretics away from the rational flock of Christ.

O most sacred one, through practical virtue you have entwined yourself in this listing of righteous men, as well as prophets, and you have zealously imitated their courage, zeal, mildness, sympathy, and their elevated lifestyle. And [you have] not only [imitated] their [virtues], but also [those of] Christ’s disciples. They possess mercy and truth that throws away the collar of law and shadows and reveals strongly to us the mysteries of true worship in the Spirit. You, [O Nicholas], have become, together with the apostles, an attendant eye-witness of these mysteries for the whole

---

<sup>3</sup> I.e. while Pharaoh was pursuing the Israelites, his thoughts were in fact under the control of God.

<sup>4</sup> I.e. the devil.

church, and you are called care-keeper and well-sounding trumpet. Now it is truly time to express the scriptural saying: “The memory of the just is praised, and the righteous shall be in everlasting remembrance” (Prov. 10:7; Ps. 112:6), and even more suitably [the Scripture] says: “When the righteous are praised, many peoples rejoice” (Prov. 29:2).

And who would worthily perform honourable praises or chant hymns to the greatness of the great deeds you have performed during your life, O father, [who are] praised with many hymns? For whatever we would call you, our speech would lack truth in all ways: and if we wished to compare your virtuous actions with those of others, it would be necessary to go through all examples of deeds.

What should we now call you? A farmer? Our word will at least be true when it is perceived in terms of contemplation:<sup>5</sup> for you have both cultivated the spiritual fields of the whole eparchy of Lycia, and chopped down the thorns of disbelief. Instead, you have sown the living word of practicing faith and stored the crop spiritually in some kind of storehouses of the soul.

Should we call you an architect? [By saying this,] we would not lie: for you have broken down the sacrificial altars of idols, and the shrines of defiled demons, with the bulldozer of your teachings and, instead, built churches for Christ in their places, and constructed sacred and honourable temples, and shrines of the martyrs. And like a farmer you have shown that newly planted, spiritual vineyards are fruitful by cultivating them. Like a wise architect, you have founded the newly built churches of believers on the firm foundation of faith, through the architecture of Spirit.

So, what should we call you? A soldier? Yes, a soldier! Like some armed army-leader you fight a war against invisible enemies and have been saved by wearing the full equipment of the word around you.<sup>6</sup> Because of this, you have driven away the attacks of the passions with the spear of faith, standing stable and unshaken like a rock. You push away all webs of deceit of the adversary, using the shield of firm hope, and you shoot arrows, combatting those who dare to attack. Therefore, you nobly protect by standing around [your people] and make those disappear, who rage in battle against your flock. And, in this way after the fight in close order, you lift up the sword of faith with the right hand of your deeds and cut off the pugnacious concision of Arius,<sup>7</sup> together with the contraction of Sabellius,<sup>8</sup> by the roots. Indeed, those who dare to assimilate or divide the providential incarnation of Christ, the true God, who is one of the blessed and honoured Trinity

---

<sup>5</sup> Here Andrew outlines how Nicholas is metaphorically a farmer, “sowing seed” and reaping and storing it up.

<sup>6</sup> Andrew goes on to describe how Nicholas puts on the “full armour of God”.

<sup>7</sup> Arius said that the Son was inferior to the Father, rather than of the same substance.

<sup>8</sup> Sabellius said that Christ was merely a man, and not God incarnate.

itself, and those who do not understand it correctly, or, on the other hand, those who do not confess the principle of defining natures in the hypostatic union of natures, that came together in one Christ and God himself, to be unconfused and completely inseparable. With the one and the same whip, according to the zeal of Phinehas, you collect those who turn away to different directions and propitiate the God of all with everyone.

What should we, now, call you? An angel? Indeed, you were not far from the fleshless state of angels, since you truly are called bodiless in body and some ethereal man or angel on earth, visible to everyone. For did appearing to the king, through dreams, and provoking amazement in him, who planned to commit a murder soon, and calming down, with a whip that did not hit, the mad right hand that aimed to slaughter out of a senseless impulse, and saving from death men who had done nothing wrong, being unexpectedly present, differ from angelic flight? Has the angel done something more extraordinary [than this], when he transferred Habakkuk from Zion to Babylon, the land of Media, to serve excellent food to Daniel, who lay in the lions' den?

Should we call you a steersman? We would be speaking the truth: for you steer most orderly those, who sail through a big and wide sea and those who are at sea near the land with the tiller of intercessions towards God and the steering-paddle of faith, turning a hurricane into a breeze and a storm into a calm, by the vigils of prayers, and, O most sacred one, you lead those, who come in faith, to the harbour of detachment.<sup>9</sup> This is manifested by you being clearly seen standing by seamen in the manner of a sailor<sup>10</sup> in the past, at the time when famine was repressing your metropolis. The harbour of Andriake knows these things: for you persuaded those, who did not intend to do so, to sail through it, so that you could feed the starving people and restrain the force of famine. As the story says, you left behind three gold coins after disappearing from the ship, but the care-taker and protector of the people of Lycians was not to remain unknown until the end, O Nicholas, who are angelic in your deeds and way of life.

For when you were still roaming in flesh and before you were set free [to go] to Christ, you visited the sorrowful in many ways and helped swiftly those who were in need, removing attackers from bloodthirsty slaughter – What else would this prove you to be than being dressed in angelic fleshlessness, and doing easily marvellous things in this [state of being]? Indeed, who would not be amazed by your patience? Who would not be struck with [your] gentle speech and mildness with them? Who [would not be struck] with your peacefulness and supplicatory

---

<sup>9</sup> ἀπάθεια (*apatheia*) - "detachment" or "dispassion". It indicates a state of detachment from worldly emotions and troubles.

<sup>10</sup> This is a reference to the miracle narrative where Nicholas appears as a sailor. The miracle part of this homily confuses elements from the life of St Nicholas of Sion (including this part, perhaps) with the legends of Nicholas of Myra.

character? As it is said<sup>11</sup>, when you were inspecting the vine twigs of [your] true vineyard in the past, you encountered Theognes of blessed memory. He was, then, a bishop of the church of the Marcianists, until you brought the man to return to what is considered good, with perhaps a hint of some kind of irritation that [separation] had come about between you. You pronounced gently, but with a loud voice, the apostolic saying and exhorted [him]<sup>12</sup>: “Come to reconciliation, O brother, before the sun sets on our anger.”

But, O most admirable father of fathers, illuminator of the inhabited world, the sanctuary of churches, the support and swift assurance of believers, the defender of those who experience injustice, now you are much more our shepherd, and you comfort us more greatly, sitting in purity near the pure God, the perfect and worshipped Trinity. [Rejoicing and] dancing around Him spiritually, together with the angelic orders, you oversee us from above with apostolic graces and fatherly succour, O divine and sacred head, and do not withdraw from us, but support [those who need support] and arm [those who need to be armed], O father, interpreter of the Scripture, and master and teacher of ineffable [mysteries]. Strengthen the like-minded<sup>13</sup> successor<sup>14</sup> of your sacred dwelling, who follows you after a long time, but who directly follows you in reverence<sup>15</sup>, as well as his sons—your grandsons—with manliness and true speech. And holding them in fatherly embrace—together, above all,—may you chase away those, who dare to attack your rational flock, with the spiritual javelins of your words, so that this small flock of yours would survive fearless, [the flock] that you have brought up and pastorally have comforted. O divinely inspired, do not cease to strengthen the priests, the hierarchy<sup>16</sup> and all the Christ-loving people with the living and unending teachings of Orthodox faith and with the magnitude of marvels. And the more you now exceedingly and more purely approach God, and hence are even more dazzled by the brilliance of the apprehension of light, the more shining and distinct is the radiance you receive in return for the pure trust in Christ.

I call you blessed, O city of Myra, metropolis of the Lycians. Oh, what kind of child-loving shepherd and protector you happened to have! You received him as a truly venerable crown and as a gift, worth being boasted of. Who is it? Nicholas, who appears clearly, with exceedingly divine wisdom, to those who are in need, the swiftest helper of those who are being harmed, the most sacred glory of priests, who is great in miracles and terrible in [divine] marvels, who guards the innocent in dangers, and who recalls to their senses those who willingly wish to do wrong.

---

<sup>11</sup> Lit. “As they say.”

<sup>12</sup> Lit.: “Say”.

<sup>13</sup> Lit. “the one who follows a similar lifestyle”.

<sup>14</sup> I.e. the bishop of Myra during the time of Andrew.

<sup>15</sup> Literally: “greyness”.

<sup>16</sup> Literally: “those who belong to the hierarchy”.

Therefore you are blessed among cities, having brought up and having set in your [bishop's] seats such a guardian of the city. About him we have said: "Let us walk in light" (cf. Jes. 2:5) and let us live in rest in his shadow, as the divine Scripture somewhere says. Alongside with him, you also have the noble champions of practicing faith, I mean Crescens, Dioscorides and Nicocles, the three martyrs<sup>17</sup> who, in the unity of their minds, sacredly shine forth the [brightness] of the Trinity, whom this very same Trinity has elevated into honour through the combats that made them worthy of gaining the Kingdom. So, once more, crown your famous head worthily by bringing him harmoniously together with these, on the one hand because he has nobly shown equal struggle with them through his deliberate attitude, on the other because he also, already in the old times, honoured the martyrs with his own pains, and because of his zeal [to imitate] them is now worthy of the crown that is woven together [for him and the martyrs].

But come together today, everyone, the most sacred and faithful audience! Having come into this temple, let us celebrate the sacred and high feast, and let us keep the memory, most worthy of praise, of our God-bearing father. Let us do this by staying far from taking pleasure in the deceitful pretences of any worldly procession or festival, and from all things that wretchedly present the evil deceit of Hellenic mysteries<sup>18</sup>, and from all games that are connected to shallow confusion<sup>19</sup> and pretentious theatrical performances<sup>20</sup>: for games worthy of laughter are those through which some hunt after vainglory, which is more wretched than anything else. Instead, let us cover [our] saint with rosebuds or anoint him with the fragrant myrrh – our own deeds – and let us crown him with the spiritual flowers of hymns. Our holy father Nicholas is fond of experiencing such things: he makes peace with such celebrations and festivals: he delights in such things more than the processional decorations, in which lay [hidden] the national [cults] and evil spirits of the Hellenes. In such things, [namely, spiritual celebrations,] also the threefold unity of mind and breath of the most noble athletes<sup>21</sup> shines forth.<sup>22</sup> O Nicholas, with them you graze together in the dwellings above, with them you shine forth, together with them you rejoice, exulting<sup>23</sup> in God the Father, as far as it is possible<sup>24</sup>, seeing and being seen,<sup>25</sup> and you are illuminated by the brightness that surround Him. O father, with their petitions towards the Divine and your prayers that are acceptable to God, may we all be liberated from all heretical and demonic attacks, from the scourges that cause

---

<sup>17</sup> In the "Index Rerum of F. Combefis, *SS. Patrum Amphilochii, ... Methodii, ... et Andreae, ... opera omnia quae reperiri potuerunt*, Paris: Piget, 1644, Crescens, Dioscorides and Nicocles are described as the tutelary martyrs of Myra.

<sup>18</sup> Andrew seems to refer here to theatrical performances that include elements from Greek mythology.

<sup>19</sup> Gr. Κάτω συγχύσεως; it is unclear what this refers to.

<sup>20</sup> Lit.: "pretentious scenes".

<sup>21</sup> I.e. the martyrs, the "athletes of God".

<sup>22</sup> Lit. "brightens up".

<sup>23</sup> Lit. "dancing".

<sup>24</sup> A favourite phrase of Maximus the Confessor (κατὰ τὸ ἔφικτον).

<sup>25</sup> Refers to spiritual contemplation.

illness and through which people are unexpectedly put into bondage and confined, and from all dangers, through the grace and mercy and benevolence towards mankind of the One, who redeemed us with the venerable blood from His life-giving side, and delivered us from the deceit of slavery, our Lord Jesus Christ, together with whom all reverence and glory, might and magnificence is due to the Father and the Holy and Life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.