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*Saint Mark's Church*

*Sunday School*

## **Saint (Kyrollis) Cyril I**

### **The Pillar of the Faith (412-444 A.D.)**

#### **Introduction**

In the year 412, after the departure of **St. Theophilus**, his nephew, **St. Cyril** the First, **the 24th Pope** of the See of Saint Mark, succeeded him. He received various descriptive titles of honor such as ``**the Daring Lion**,`` ``**the Burnished Lamp**,`` ``**the Second Athanasius**,`` and more specifically ``**the Pillar of the Faith**.`` He was 36 years old when he was unanimously elected to take the helm of his Church. Throughout his life he made it a rule never to advance any doctrine which he had not learnt from the ancient fathers.

#### **His Enthronement**

As a lad, Cyril was sent to the monastery of Saint Macari, where he assimilated the wisdom of the desert Fathers. After having acquired all the education the desert could give, he returned to Alexandria where he was ordained a priest and then a Pope.

#### **His Christian Zeal**

As soon as he was consecrated Pope of Alexandria, he dedicated all his power to defend the Church against the apostasies of Emperor Julian and the rise of the Nestorian heresy. **St. Cyril** directly set himself to refute them in terms that were clear, strong and convincing.

In the year 428 Nestorius, a priest-monk of Antioch, was made archbishop of Constantinople; and he there taught with some of his clergy that there were two distinct persons in Christ. According to the Nestorian concept, Christ was two separate persons, the one divine and beyond the reach of human frailty, and the other human and susceptible to all the fragility of the flesh. The divine Christ could neither suffer or die, and therefore, on the Cross it was the human Christ alone who suffered and died apart from the divine Christ. Nestorius had spoken out against calling the blessed Virgin Mary the ``Theotokos`` or ``Mother-of-God.``

**St. Cyril** strongly contested these views expounding the Orthodox principle of the indivisible union of the divine and human natures of Christ, and arguing that if Jesus Christ is God, it follows that his mother is the "Mother-of-God" who bore Him forever. This is what the Apostles taught us and the doctrine of our fathers. And just as the human mother, has no share in creating the Divinity of her child, yet is considered the mother of the whole person, and not merely the mother of his physical nature; so it is with Mary who is the Mother of Christ in His entirety.

Saint Cyril wrote letters to Nestorius urging him to stop promoting an idea which is equivalent to blasphemy, but the later obstinately refused to be convinced that he had fallen into a heretic way of thinking. A situation developed that was somewhat similar to that which had developed between Saint Athanasius and Arius. Saint Cyril was as full of faith and fiery zeal in his tenacious stand against Nestorius as Saint Athanasius had been against Arius. Just as Saint Athanasius had saved the Faith concerning the Logos in the Nicene Creed, so did Saint Cyril in defending the '*Theotokos*' maintaining the Orthodox Doctrine concerning the incarnation of the Logos in the Introduction to the Creed which he wrote in this regard '*we honor you , Mother of the True Light,....*

**Saint Cyril** sent Nestorius a mild expostulation, but was answered with haughtiness and contempt. He also sent a number of letters to the Heads of other Churches (Antioch, Jerusalem, Rome and Aleppo), and to the imperial family. He received several replies lauding his efforts and siding with him. **Saint Cyril** also wrote another letter to Nestorius with an exposition of the Nicene Creed and a second part, an affirmation of the true faith, followed by 12 anathemas. Nestorius, however, showed himself more obstinate than ever, refused to sign, and exerted every effort to antagonize Emperor Theodosius against **Saint Cyril**.

### *Calling a General Council in Ephesus*

The people of Constantinople themselves urged the Emperor to call a Council of all the bishops to deal with this subject. This occasioned the summoning of the third general Council which was held at Ephesus in June 431 AD, attended by 200 bishops who elected **Saint Cyril** to preside over them on the authority of his own dignity. The attitudes of the Emperor and of Nestorius towards St. Cyril were so hostile that they called him "the proud pharaoh." Nestorius was present in the town, but refused to appear; so after his sermons had been read and other evidence received against him, his doctrines were condemned, and a sentence of excommunication and deposition was pronounced by the 200 who proved themselves to be indeed the worthy successors of the Nicene Fathers.' The

people of Ephesus who had gradually gathered outside the Church, and on hearing the verdict of the Council, they shouted for joy, lit torches, brought their incense-burners, and formed a long procession for the bishops escorting them to their abodes.

Six days later there arrived at Ephesus Archbishop John of Antioch, with several of his bishops who had not been able to reach Ephesus in time. They were in favour of Nestorius, although they did not share his errors, of which indeed they deemed him innocent. Instead of associating themselves with the council, they assembled by themselves and presumed to depose **Saint Cyril**, accusing him in turn of heresy. Both sides appealed to the Emperor, by whose order **Saint Cyril** and Nestorius were both arrested and kept in confinement and the verdict of the Council annulled. When three legates arrived from the Roman Church, the matter took another turn. After a careful consideration of what had been done, the legates condemned Nestorius, approved Saint Cyril's conduct, and declared the sentence pronounced against him void.

With the obstinacy of the Emperor in this regard, anger and consternation seized the people of Ephesus who supported the Ephesian Council. At their head was the hermit Dalmatius who had never gone out of his cell for 48 years, and whom Emperor Theodosius venerated highly. Dalmatius broke his habit and led the people to the imperial palace chanting the psalms in the streets. The Emperor afterwards was completely changed and vindicated **Saint Cyril** with honor and ratified the sentence passed on Nestorius and ordered his exile. Though the bishops of the Antiochene province continued their schism for a while, they made peace with **Saint Cyril** in 433, when they condemned Nestorius and gave a clear and orthodox declaration of their own faith.

### **His Great Devotion**

We have to thank **Saint Cyril** for the firm and uncompromising stand he took with regard to the dogma of the Incarnation - an attitude which led to the clear statements of the great council over which he presided. We ought indeed to be grateful that we, in our generation, are left in no doubt as to what we should believe with regard to that holy mystery upon which we base our faith as Christians. The great devotion of this Saint to the Blessed Sacrament is manifest from the frequency with which he emphasizes the effects it produces upon those who receive it worthily. In a letter to Nestorius, which received the general and formal assent of the fathers at Ephesus, he had written:

*“Proclaiming the death according to the flesh of the only begotten Son of God, that is, Jesus Christ, and confessing His resurrection from the dead*

*and ascent into Heaven, we celebrate the bloodless sacrifice in our churches; and thus approach the mystic blessings, and are sanctified by partaking of the holy flesh and the precious blood of Christ the Savior of us all. And we receive it, not as common flesh (God forbid), nor as the flesh of a man sanctified and associated with the Word according to the unity of merit, or as having a divine indwelling, but as a really the life-giving and very flesh of the Word Himself."*

### **His Later Works**

One of the noblest legacies bequeathed by **Saint Cyril** to the Church is the Liturgy which bears his name. According to tradition, it had been given orally by Saint Mark himself, but Saint Cyril completed it and wrote it. This Liturgy overflows with deep spiritual insight and reverberates the inmost yearnings towards God. It is an ancient custom in the Coptic Church to chant it during Lent .

His ceaseless activity took heavy toll of his health. Worn out by labors rather than by years, he entered into the joy of his Lord after steering the Church through storm and calm for 31 years.

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<http://www.ccel.org/ccel/cyрил?show=biography>

## **St. Cyril of Alexandria - (ca. 378 - 444), Patriarch of Alexandria**

Cyril was born at Alexandria, Egypt. He was nephew of the patriarch of that city, Theophilus. Cyril received a classical and theological education at Alexandria and was ordained by his uncle. He accompanied Theophilus to Constantinople in 403 and was present at the Synod of the Oak that deposed John Chrysostom, whom he believed guilty of the charges against him.

He succeeded his uncle Theophilus as patriarch of Alexandria on Theophilus' death in 412, but only after a riot between Cyril's supporters and the followers of his rival Timotheus. Cyril at once began a series of attacks against the Novatians, whose churches he closed; the Jews, whom he drove from the city; and governor Orestes, with whom he disagreed about some of his actions. In 430 Cyril became embroiled with Nestorius, patriarch of Constantinople, who was preaching that Mary was not the Mother of God since Christ was Divine and not human, and consequently she should not have the word theotokos (God-bearer) applied to her.

He persuaded Pope Celestine I to convoke a synod at Rome, which condemned Nestorius, and then did the same at his own synod in Alexandria. Celestine directed Cyril to depose Nestorius, and in 431, Cyril presided over the third General Council at Ephesus, attended by some two hundred bishops, which condemned all the tenets of Nestorius and his followers before the arrival of Archbishop John of Antioch and forty-two followers who believed

Nestorius was innocent. When they found what had been done, they held a council of their own and deposed Cyril. Emperor Theodosius II arrested both Cyril and Nestorius but released Cyril on the arrival of Papal Legates who confirmed the council's actions against Nestorius and declared Cyril innocent of all charges. Two years later, Archbishop John, representing the moderate Antiochene bishops, and Cyril reached an agreement and joined in the condemnation, and Nestorius was forced into exile.

During the rest of his life, Cyril wrote treatises that clarified the doctrines of the Trinity and the Incarnation and that helped prevent Nestorianism and Pelagianism from taking long-term deep root in the Christian community. He was the most brilliant theologian of the Alexandrian tradition. His writings are characterized by accurate thinking, precise exposition, and great reasoning skills. Among his writings are commentaries on John, Luke, and the Pentateuch, treatises on dogmatic theology, and Apologia against Julian the Apostate, and letters and sermons.

He died on the 9th or the 27th of June, 444, after an episcopate of nearly thirty-two years.