

# In the Spirit of *Saint Nicholas*

**A saint's popularity** is not necessarily affected by the absence of “details” found in history.

The popularity of a Saint Nicholas who is honored in both the Eastern and the Western Churches shows this to be true. Next to the Blessed Virgin, he is the most depicted by Christian artists. Yet, we can pinpoint only the fact that Nicholas was the fourth-century bishop of Myra, a city in Lycia, a province of Asia Minor.

As with many of the saints, we know about Saint Nicholas through the colorful stories told about his relationship with God and his interactions with others. These stories have been retold through the centuries. We remember Saint Nicholas on December 6<sup>th</sup>.

Legend holds that Saint Nicholas was a Roman Citizen in Myra during the time of the worst persecution of Christians, under the Emperor Diocletian (284 -305). When he became the Bishop of Myra, he created a ‘spy’ network of believers who would report to him any family in dire “need”.

Nicholas would deliver secretly during the night, packages containing what that family needed. Food, medicine, money, ‘forged’ documents, etc. was placed in a bag which Nicholas would toss over the wall which surrounded their home. The next morning the family would find the ‘gift’ as they were leaving home.

Several times Nicholas was stopped and questioned by the ‘police’ for breaking curfew but because of his Roman Citizenship status he would be released. Most likely the police believed Nicholas was stealing the things he had with him instead of delivering them to those in need. After all what good Roman Citizen would even care about the poor let alone help them.

When it became safe to openly practice one’s Faith in Jesus, the deeds of Nicholas came to light. When the new Emperor Constantine who stopped the slaughter of Christians, called for the Bishops of the Church to gather for the First Ecumenical Council, Bishop Nicholas attended. This was the Council of Nicaea 325 AD which led to the Nicene Creed we profess during Mass. Saint Nicholas died around the year 350 AD.

Over the centuries, the legend of Saint Nicholas evolved into the custom of gift-giving on the saint’s feast day. In the English-speaking countries, Saint Nicholas became, by a twist of the tongue, Santa Claus.

## **Some Thing To Think About:**

The nit-picking eye of modern history makes us question some of the legends surrounding St. Nicholas and his life. Since the goal of the Roman Empire was to erase from history the Christian Faith, the lack of ‘documentation’ and “official” reports about Saint Nicholas are not surprising. We can learn from the lessons taught by his acts of charity and look deeper at our approach to this Christmas season. Instead of being concerned about what we will get, let us look for ways to share our joy with those who are around us, especially those in real need.

This December 6<sup>th</sup> strive to imitate Saint Nicholas by secret acts of kindness, by small gifts given to loved ones and by taking time to remember the Reason For This Season of Joy.

## **Church Quote:**

“In order to be able to consult more suitably the welfare of the faithful according to the condition of each one, a bishop should strive to become duly acquainted with their needs in the social circumstances in which they live... He should manifest his concern for all, no matter what their age, condition, or nationality, be they natives, strangers, or foreigners” (*Decree on the Bishops’ Pastoral Office*, 16).

**Saint Nicholas is the Patron Saint of:** Bakers, Brewers, Brides, Grooms, Children, Travelers, Merchants, Pawnbrokers, Russia, and Greece.