

**On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, the holy Church commemorates  
the extraordinary miracle of our most holy Lady,  
the THEOTOKOS and EVER-VIRGIN MARY,  
which occurred at her all-august Church of the Myrtle Trees  
on the island of Kythera, when the paralytic arose.<sup>11</sup>**

Myrtidiotissa is the name of the icon that was found in Kythera<sup>12</sup> under the following circumstances. On this island, commonly called Tsirigon, there existed in ancient times a desolate place. It was called Myrtidia because of the multitude of myrtaceae species, that is, the myrtle family of trees and shrubs. It was a place only useful to shepherds who grazed their herds of animals there. To this place, then, a certain pious Christian<sup>13</sup> was directed in a divine vision which he beheld while sleeping. Having a great reverence toward our Lady Theotokos, he obeyed her command to go to Myrtidia. Standing there and looking about, he observed



*Myrtidiotissa*

that it was a wild and uncultivated place. While gazing over the landscape, he

<sup>11</sup> An earlier account of this icon, entitled "Service of the All-immaculate Panagia...Myrtidiotissa (of the Myrtle Tree)," was written by Sophocles Kaloutsos (Athens, 1953); therein it is recorded that many miracles occurred at the discovery of this icon. A Supplicatory Canon was written by Father Gerasimos Mikrayiannanites and was published by the Metropolitan of Kythera, Meletios, in 1961.

<sup>12</sup> Kythera (36°10'N 22°59'E).

<sup>13</sup> The name of the pious Christian has not been bequeathed to us, since it is conjectured that some two hundred years passed from the finding of the icon to the epoch when the grace-filled icon was generally known by the people of Kythera.

heard an invisible voice speaking to him: "If thou shouldst search here close by, thou shalt find my icon; for it is some time since I came here that I should bestow on this place my joy and help."

That godly Christian, hearing this voice, turned about to see where the voice emanated and who was speaking, but he saw no one. Afraid, he made the sign of the precious and life-giving Cross, while saying, "Lord Jesus Christ, help me. And thou, O my Lady and Mistress, who hast so much boldness toward thine only-begotten Son, delay not to reveal to me if this is thy will and the meaning of the voice that I heard." After speaking these things in prayer, he began exploring the forest to find what was desired. After much effort, he finally discovered that for which he yearned. Suddenly, he saw, in the branches of a myrtle tree, an icon of our most holy Lady Theotokos and Ever-virgin Mary. His soul was filled with much joy. He then recognized that the voice that he heard was that of the most holy Theotokos, who had guided him there in order to find her holy icon.<sup>14</sup>

That good and godly Christian fell down and venerated the icon. With tears and thanksgiving, he reverently embraced and kissed the icon of the Mother of God. He also perceived a magnificently fragrant incense in that place. Thereupon, with eagerness, he freely offered to help, by the might of the Theotokos, to cut away the trees and clear that area. He built a small church dedicated to the Theotokos, and the newly-revealed icon was placed therein, and was surnamed Myrtidiotissa, since it was found in the midst of myrtle trees. As a result, the place was named Myrtidia, because it contained an ancient forest of myrtle trees and shrubs. That noble and honorable Christian also built a small cell next to the church. He became a monk and dwelt there, serving the divine church of the Theotokos and offering veneration to her sacred and wondrous icon.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> The exact year of the discovery of the icon is not known. It is conjectured that it was before the 14<sup>th</sup> C., as is maintained by Sophocles Kaloutses [ib., p. 60]. In an older article, entitled "Kythera Throughout the Ages," which appeared in the newspaper edition of *Kytheraïke* [Year 4, Period 2, No. 39, dated 1-10-1928], a chronological table was presented listing the important events that occurred on the island of Kythera. Therein, it is recorded that the finding of the holy icon took place in 1160.

<sup>15</sup> In the aforementioned note regarding the work, entitled "Service of the Panagia Myrtidiotissa," by S. Kaloutses, he mentions that a shepherd found the holy icon and brought it back to his house. However, that very same evening, the icon invisibly returned to its previous location in the myrtle shrubs. The shepherd, astonished, returned to the myrtle shrubs and found the icon in the same place where he previously  
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At length, after his repose, another reverent monk, named Leontios, enlarged the church and built monastic cells. Thus, he established a complete monastery in that place. Gradually, the fame of that holy icon spread far and wide. From various places, pious Christians were coming on pilgrimage and venerating the icon. They were offering alms and votives, since many miracles were taking place for the faithful who hastened to the Mother of God. Thus, the good report and glory of Panagia<sup>16</sup> Myrtidiotissa, year by year, spread to all the world.

Much later, there was a pious Christian, named Theodore Koubanios, who had a special reverence for this most marvellous icon of Panagia Myrtidiotissa. Beyond the other liturgies and feast days which were celebrated at this monastery, he had the good custom to take along all his relatives and friends from the Dormition of the Theotokos on the 15<sup>th</sup> of August until the celebration of the feast day of the icon on the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, that they might attend and celebrate together forty Liturgies. In time, this custom spread throughout the island of Kythera.

Now it came to pass that the above-mentioned Theodore became ill and was afflicted with paralysis. Though he lay bedridden for many years with this dread disease, it was not his wish to be absent from his customary attendance at the feast. Hence, in his place, he sent his children and relatives to celebrate the feast reverently. He also was most generous in almsgiving to the monastery. Never did his faith and his veneration toward the Lady Theotokos diminish in the least. Once, when it was the feast day, as he lay in his bed far away, with tears he was praying and saying, "My Lady Myrtidiotissa, have mercy on me, the sinner; for thou art the helper of the helpless and incurable, and their refuge and visitation. Such as these invoke thee, for thou art the protection and guardian of those that supplicate thee. Help thou me, the sinner and thine unworthy slave, by granting me that much desired gift of health that I, too, may physically attend thy feast even in the coming year, before I finish my life, and that I might venerate thine icon."

With reverence and tears, this and much more was the ill Theodore speaking; and he always was glorifying God. After the passage of considerable years, there came a time when the feast was celebrated again. Everything

<sup>15</sup>(...continued)

discovered it. He took it up again and returned to his house. Again, however, the icon returned to its place. Now this happened thrice. Finally, the shepherd was convinced that it was the will of the Theotokos to remain among the myrtles. He raised up a small church where the icon was deposited.

<sup>16</sup> Panagia, Greek appellation for the Virgin Theotokos, signifying "all-holy one."

had been readied for the feast, and just as Theodore's family and friends were about to leave for church, he summoned his children to him and said with tears, "Brethren and children, friends and relatives, I have seen for myself, with the passage of many years of suffering from paralysis, that I am not able to be cured. I beseech you, therefore, prepare a bed that you might raise me up and convey me to the monastery, so that with my own eyes I may venerate the sacred icon of my Lady Myrtidiotissa; perhaps she shall take pity and cure me, the wretched one, even as she has wrought cures for others who have hastened to her." Hearing such sorrowful words filled with faith, reverence, and compunction, the children and relatives of Theodore prepared a bed to transport him. Four of them bore the bed with Theodore thereon. They carried him to the church of our most holy Mistress and Theotokos of the Myrtle Trees. As Theodore requested, they placed his bed before her august icon.

Theodore then raised his eyes to the icon of the Theotokos. Weeping, he began speaking to the icon piously and saying, "My Lady and Mistress, Queen of heaven and earth, the Maiden who was prophesied, who gave birth to our Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son and Logos of God, the living One, and remained ever-virgin, thou who hast received so much grace and become the Mother of God of the Highest, Whom thou heldest as an infant in thy holy embrace, thou hast so much authority that whatever thou dost wish, thou art able to do, and to those who seek it of thee, thou givest every grace, because thou hast in thy hands the Fountain and the Cause of all gifts. Thou, therefore, who art the help of the helpless, the guardian of orphans, the physician of the infirm, the comfort of the afflicted, the preserver of those in peril, have mercy also upon me. Mediate on my behalf with thy most compassionate only-begotten Son that He may have mercy on me, the sinner. And even as He healed many sick folk, raising up the dead and restoring paralytics by only His divine word when He was in the world, thus may He do for me, the lowly one. Today, when we sinners celebrate the fortieth day from thy holy Dormition, show forth thy many mercies and make known thy power to me, even as thou hast rendered to many others during this holy day. For very mighty is the entreaty of the Mother before the well-disposed Master. Disregard not my tears; overlook not my sighs. Have compassion on my burden of this longstanding illness and my great and unbearable pains. Withhold not thy boundless goodness on account of the sins of my youth, but grant to me that which I seek and desire, my health."

Those gathered in the church, hearing such supplicatory words spoken by Theodore with tear-filled eyes, were themselves sorrowed and began weeping, beseeching for his cure. As the order of the divine office continued,

and the priest and people respectively, when it came to exit the church for service in the midst of the congregation of many people coming to hear, they heard this, a great fear gripped them close by the sea. They were terrified by the thefts and abductions in the church in order to confirm their faith, saying that "the upheaval that they might take us into service and the church, in the forest that they might do anything yet, for it was as if Theodore was left behind taken themselves away. Theodore, weeping, before the Virgin-mother Mary, the unfortunate one, because of account of this, I implore protection of thy wings, from barbarians."

Theodore uttered these words on his face. It then seemed to him that he also rise and leave." Theodore, and motionless, little by little, his sickness and began running account of the paradoxical dream to him. While all gazed around him. He once come to church. He looked there. There was no trace of paralysis. Finally, he came to the cure which the Mistress of his great joy, he kept saying. Thee, O my God. I glorify in thy charity, my Lady. I thank thee for thy holy name for thine alms rendered to me, the sinner long before was ill and

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and the priest and people were chanting the hymns of Vespers and Orthros, respectively, when it came time to chant the canons, one of the parishioners exited the church for some need. He then hurriedly returned and announced in the midst of the congregation, “Brethren, I heard the disturbance and noise of many people coming up from the sea in our direction.” When the others heard this, a great fear gripped the them, because the monastery was situated close by the sea. They were often troubled by pirates, who carried out many thefts and abductions in the various villages of the island. Some left the church in order to confirm the announcement. When they returned, they were saying that “the upheaval and disorder is nothing else than a barbarian attack, that they might take us captive!” Thereupon, in terror, the people left the service and the church. Some fled to the mountains, while others dashed into the forest that they might guard against the peril, though they had not seen anything yet, for it was night. In their fearful, hasty departure, the paralyzed Theodore was left behind; for even his children and relatives had speedily taken themselves away. Unable to move and bereft of all human assistance, Theodore, weeping, began to pray loudly to the Theotokos, saying, “O Virgin-mother Mary, Theotokos, Mistress of the universe and the hope of me, the unfortunate one, behold, all have fled and left me alone and helpless. O account of this, I implore thy divine grace to help me and cover me under the protection of thy wings, that I might escape the merciless hands of the godless barbarians.”

Theodore uttered this entreaty with warm tears streaming down his face. It then seemed to him that he heard a voice speaking to him, “Do thou also rise and leave.” Then—O the wonder!—he who was previously paralyzed and motionless, little by little, began to move. He got down off his bed of sickness and began running that he might catch up with those that fled. On account of the paradoxical cure, he remained ecstatic; for it seemed like a dream to him. While all this was taking place, daybreak arrived. Theodore gazed around him. He observed neither barbarians nor the Christians that had come to church. He looked upon himself and marvelled at his restored health. There was no trace of his illness. It was as if he had never suffered from paralysis. Finally, he came to accept the miracle and unexpected help and cure which the Mistress and Lady of the universe had wrought for him. From his great joy, he kept saying for a long time, “Lord, have mercy. I glorify Thee, O my God. I glorify thee, O my Panagia. I glorify thy mercy and charity, my Lady. I thank thee, my grace-filled Myrtidiotissa. I glorify thy holy name for thine abundant and most admirable help which thou hast rendered to me, the sinner and thine unworthy slave; for I know that I not long before was ill and paralyzed, but now I am of sound body.” After this

thanksgiving and laudation, he started to shout to his relatives, saying, "My children, my relatives and friends, beloved Christians, come and offer thanks to our Lady Myrtidiotissa, and give glory to her holy name. Be not frightened, for our enemies, the barbarians, are not here as you thought. But come and see the extraordinary wonder which was wrought for me, and let us glorify her grace!"<sup>17</sup>

Those who thought they were being besieged, upon hearing such shouting, suspected that the barbarians were using a ruse to trick them. Consequently, some moved deeper into the forest, while others ran further afield. But Theodore, with a great voice, was running about with his arms held open in the morning mist and crying out, "Come my children." He then started calling out for each by name. "I am your father who was a paralytic; see, my Lady has healed me. Approach, then, without fear, and give thanks for her grace." Some of them heard him. When they looked about and saw that he was quite alone, they drew near, as the sun rose and warmed the morning air. They were trying to reconcile in their minds how the former motionless paralytic was moving about so freely and lifting up his voice in praise. When they beheld him close and saw that he was completely well, they were astounded and cried out, "Lord, have mercy!" They were asking the sick man how he was cured. He then recounted in detail all the events that had transpired. Thereupon, all acknowledged the wonderworking of the Mother of God; so they returned with Theodore to the monastery. They took up the service where they had left off, at the canons, and then celebrated the divine Liturgy. All gave glory with great joy to the most holy Theotokos. Even though her help seemed to be much delayed, in order to see the patience of the supplicant, yet she did not forget him; but, in an hour when he did not hope for it, his desire for restored health was fulfilled.

Theodore, therefore, celebrated that feast yearly, with the anniversary of his cure, for the rest of his life, making it a great public festival. Before his repose, he left a command to his children that they were to celebrate this feast; and, to this day, his descendants do keep the festival yearly. Little by little, reverence for the icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree spread throughout the world, together with news of this miracle. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of September, the people of Kythera assemble at the Monastery of Myrtidion and celebrate this great feast day with a festival, to the glory of our Lady and Theotokos of the Myrtle Tree. If one were to recount all the miracles

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Once, barbarians Myrtidion. Approaching thought they beheld them. They surmised the fire them. The barbarians nothing. Thus, the miracle the protection of our I

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Oftentimes, the account of the barren through the foresight of succor to those who in days and thus sustained and gifts which the Church icon of Myrtidiotissa, some built cells, which commemorate the beauty attain its present majesty miracles occurring through thanksgiving to the Theotokos silver. They sent to Constantinople the cover was shipped

<sup>17</sup> This miracle, according to S. Kaloutsis (*Service of Myrtidiotissa*), took place at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> C. or the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> C.

<sup>18</sup> Enchase, that is, to enclose the icon with carved figures; there are cutouts in the s

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performed for those who flee to her in faith, such a one would see that this would be impossible, since her wonders are boundless. However, let us narrate a few to her glory, and then we shall close our account.

Once, barbarians came by sea in order to despoil the Monastery of Myrtidion. Approaching by night opposite the monastery, the marauders thought they beheld many fires surrounding the premises of the monastery. They surmised the fires to belong to islanders who came out to do battle with them. The barbarians were seized with fear and turned away, having taken nothing. Thus, the monastery was saved, together with the whole island, by the protection of our Lady Theotokos.

At another time, as a ship at sea was traveling immediately opposite the Monastery of Myrtidion, it encountered frightening swells and rough waters, so that passengers and crew were in danger of being thrown into the sea. Those on board then invoked the help of both our Lady Theotokos of the Myrtle Tree and the great Saint Nicholas. Each traveller promised that, if he should be saved, he would offers alms in her house; that is, he would make a contribution to the monastery, as much as he was able. The mighty waves then subsided, and all those on board survived. They went together to the monastery that they might render thanks to our Lady Theotokos. Since each one pledged a donation, they collected enough to build the Church of Saint Nicholas at the "black rock," in remembrance of the miracle.

Oftentimes, the island of Kythera was struck by great famine on account of the barrenness of the earth and the failure of crops. However, through the foresight and care of the Lady Theotokos, who is a helper and succor to those who invoke her, the earth began to produce fruit for many days and thus sustained the populace. On account of the many benefactions and gifts which the Christians received upon hastening to the wonderworking icon of Myrtidiotissa, out of courtesy and good will for her gracious gifts, some built cells, while others dedicated properties and other votives to commemorate the benefits received. In such a manner did the monastery attain its present majestic appearance. The people, seeing the boundless miracles occurring through this holy icon, out of piety toward the icon and thanksgiving to the Theotokos, decided to adorn and enchase<sup>18</sup> the icon with silver. They sent to Crete for the materials. When the work was completed, the cover was shipped to Kythera; but outside of the harbor of the island,

iotissa), took place at the

<sup>18</sup> Enchase, that is, to enshrine or encase the sacred icon, by placing a silver plate over the icon with carved figures and designs of the icon carved or cut in relief. Often, there are cutouts in the silver to expose the countenances of those depicted.



called Kapsale, Turkish vessels were setting up to attack, with the object of taking the ship from Crete.

The Christians standing on dry land observed the Turks maneuvering. What they did not know was that the endangered ship was carrying the silver covering for their sacred icon. The governor of the island, however, was certainly enlightened by our Lady Theotokos. In a show of boldness, she ordered that he fire one small cannonball from the fortress. The small projectile went forth, directed by invisible power, so that it passed alongside the Turkish ship. The Turks, seeing the warning shot, were frightened and withdrew, leaving unmolested the ship they targeted. Now both the governor and the people of Kythera understood that something wonderful and extraordinary took place, for it was impossible for the piece of ordnance they had at the fort to fire a ball that could reach beyond the harbor. After the ship sailed into the harbor, the Kytherians learned that her cargo included the silver covering for their sacred icon. They rejoiced mightily at the grace of the Theotokos and the miracle she had performed, for the community's gift to the icon was preserved and delivered out of Turkish hands. Thus, the people offered their gift to enchase the miracle-working icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree.

On many occasions, the inhabitants of Kythera suffered from drought. When this occurred, they conducted litanies and processions bearing the sacred icon to the afflicted places. Straightway, rain came and soaked the earth, which rendered its fruit for the maintenance of the pious Christians who venerated the Theotokos.

Also, whenever a pestilential epidemic struck the island, the wonderworking icon of Myrtidiotissa was taken about in a procession. Supplications were offered to the Mother of God, who would drive out the disease and put an end to the destruction. This happened not only on Kythera, but in other places as well; and not once or twice, but many times, even as these instances are confirmed by both oral tradition and the written documentation of witnesses.

When the Turks made war against the island of Crete, the fleet came to Kythera. One night, a multitude of men went ashore, and entered the village of Kyras, facing the river. They came with the intention of capturing as many of the natives as they were able. By the divine œconomy of God and the Theotokos of the Myrtle Tree, the inhabitants were rescued when some heard a voice informing them of the pending danger. Thereupon, women and children went deep into the forest, while the men prepared to go out and fight. Now the Turkish soldiers on leave had received an order from the pasha that they were to return to their ships when they heard the cannon fire twice. Not

much time passed when they understood this to their return to the ship. They returned to the ship with damage. While returning, they were robbed whomever they met. The pasha was surprised and angry at their early return. The pasha, however, did not fire, and that day the men heard. The Christians shot that the Turks took the Theotokos. Through her grace, for, at that very hour, the sacred icon of the

We have mentioned by our Lady Theotokos an islander, John Kaloutsos, an author who recorded many wonders. Even to this day her sacred icon of Myrtle Tree silver votives in thanks. These souvenirs are suspended before it. The natives is rich before the icon, endowed with many attributes. It is found in a desolate place. Hence, as another sun, through her grace-flow may we be saved. Amen

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the Turks maneuvering. She was carrying the silver icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree. The show of boldness, she led the fortress. The small icon that passed alongside the other icons, were frightened and silent. Now both the governor and the people, something wonderful and miraculous, a piece of ordnance they had hidden in the harbor. After the ship was captured, her cargo included the icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree. It was brought mightily at the grace of the Mother for the community's gift to the Turkish hands. Thus, the icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree

had suffered from drought. In processions bearing the icon, the people came and soaked the icon with the pious Christians who

had struck the island, the icon was brought about in a procession. The icon, who would drive out the Turks, had led not only on Kythera, but many times, even as far as the end of the written documents

of Crete, the fleet came ashore, and entered the harbor with the intention of capturing the island. The economy of God and the people were rescued when some of the people were rescued. Thereupon, women and children were ordered to go out and fight. In order from the pasha that the icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree should be fired twice. Not

much time passed when the Turkish soldiers did hear the cannon fire twice. They understood this to be the pasha's signal, so, according to the command, they returned to the ships. As a result, the islanders did not sustain extensive damage. While returning to their ships, the Turks burned a few places and robbed whomever they found on the way. When they went on board, the pasha was surprised and amazed to see them, and he asked them for the cause of their early return. The men asserted that they heard the cannon fire twice. The pasha, however, kept refuting their claims. He insisted that the cannon was not fired, and that it was impossible for him to understand what signal his men heard. The Christians, nevertheless, understood. For the two cannon shots that the Turks thought they heard were two claps of thunder sent by the Theotokos. Through her guardianship, she protected those that invoked her; for, at that very hour, the faithful were chanting a Supplicatory Canon before the sacred icon of the Mother of God of the Myrtle Tree.

We have mentioned a few from the multitude of miracles performed by our Lady Theotokos. In 1732, she cured the wealthy and nearly dead islander, John Kaloutses, who was an ancestor of Sophocles Kaloutses, the author who recorded for modern readers many of the icon's glorious wonders. Even to this day, our all-immaculate Lady works miracles through her sacred icon of Myrtidiotissa. Many Christians have dedicated gold and silver votives in thanksgiving for cures received by the Theotokos' magnanimity. These souvenirs of healing and help either surround the icon or are suspended before it. Even though the islanders are poor, the piety of the natives is rich before the Theotokos. Consequently, the monastery has been endowed with many and various properties. The monastery itself, however, is found in a desolate and quiet place that fills the soul with joy and gladness. Hence, as another sun, the rays of the all-immaculate Lady's miracles spread through her grace-flowing icon of the Myrtle Tree. Through her intercessions may we be saved. Amen.

Through the intercessions of Thy Saints,  
O Christ God, have mercy on us. Amen.