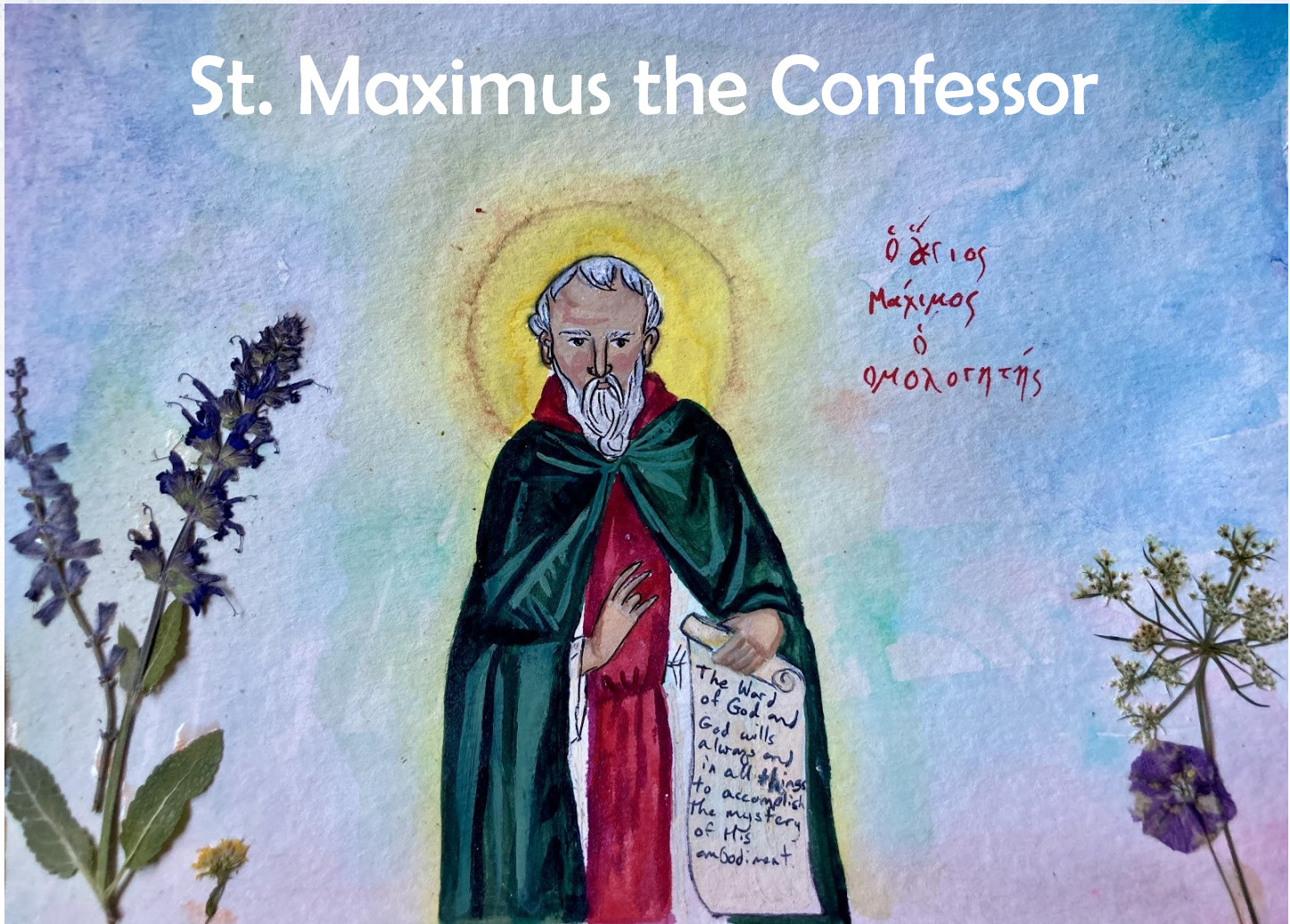


# Once Upon a SAINT

by Rebecca O'Loughlin

## St. Maximus the Confessor



My dearest children, almost 600 years after baby Jesus was born, a boy named Maximus was born in the Middle East. He came from a noble Byzantine family who could afford to give him the best education available.

Max learned well! He enjoyed school and was barely thirty years old when he became the first secretary and head counselor to the emperor Heraclius. Emperor Heraclius was amazed by this brilliant young man.

Heraclius was an impressive emperor himself, and was a grandpa by the time Maximus started working for him. He had been

honored as emperor in the Byzantine and Roman worlds alike. He was even honored by the Muslims! But our Max realized that there was one thing he couldn't agree with Heraclius (or his successors) on.

Basileus (or emperor) Heraclius told his counselors, "It is clear to me that Christ had only one will, the Divine Will (a "will" is that part of you that desires and decides what to do). If he had a human will, then he would have given in to all sorts of human things, like too much food or pretty women. But He was sinless because He was God and was never tempted by the human things the rest of us are. It was easy for Him!"

The counselors all nodded in agreement. It made it easier, thinking that Jesus never struggled with human sin. Only Max frowned.

“Basileus Heraclius, if you please...remember when Christ fasted in the desert for forty days? He was hungry and weak. The devil appeared to Him and offered Him food and riches. Scriptures say that Christ *was tempted but remained strong. If He had only a Divine Will, why would the devil have bothered to try and convince Jesus to choose fame, food and earthly glory? He must have had a human will, one that had to undergo human choices and human suffering too. The fact that Jesus stayed strong means that we are also called to be strong against temptation. Christ suffered as we do, but remained faithful to the Father in everything.*”

The other counselors did not like this explanation.

One counselor named Sphalma spoke up: “Maximus, if Christ was like us, fully human, then His human will would have struggled against the Divine Will. What a human wants is too different from what God wants.”

Maximus replied sternly, “If we were to hold that Christ had only a Divine Will, then could He truly be called a man? Could He have paid the price for the sin that man committed? No...Christ must have been fully human, body, soul, and will, as well as fully Divine. If Christ did not choose and accept the sacrifice of the cross as a human being with a human will, then was it truly a choice? But we know that He *did have a choice because He prayed: “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.” The Divine Will is One in the Father and the Son, and Christ clearly chose to obey the Divine Will with His human nature, even though He naturally recoiled at the idea of suffering and the cross. Therefore He had a human will as well as a Divine Will, a human will that fully submitted to God.*”

Councilor Lathos shook his head in disbelief: “It follows that if Christ had a human will like we do, then our human wills should be submitted to the Divine Will too. But it is impossible to be sinless and perfect like Christ. There are a great many alluring things that our human wills are incapable of saying no to!”

“Yes! Yes, that is it exactly! *We are called to be like Christ! We are called to resist sin! Doesn't St. Paul say that we Christians have “put on Christ”? Do you remember how Jesus allowed the Divine Glory to shine through His human nature on Mt. Tabor? Well, you and I are meant to be transfigured too, in fact, the whole world is to be transfigured in Christ, made new. This is theosis (which means “making divine” in Greek). Theosis is nothing that we do ourselves, but happens in us through God's triumph of love and mercy. It is a process of becoming more and more like Christ, perfect and without sin.*”

The court continued to resist Maximus. So he retired from his empirical position and entered the Chrysopolis monastery at Tsageri, the country that is currently known as Georgia.

This heresy of Monothelitism continued to spread. The emperor issued an edict saying that it was required for the faith to believe that Christ did not have a human will. Maximus, for his part, continued to reject the heresy. He even traveled to Africa, encouraging the bishops there to remain strong in the Faith.

In Crete, Maximus defended the Faith, preaching that Christ was fully God and fully man, united in one Person. Then Maximus went to Carthage, where he preached for five years. One day the new Patriarch of Constantinople came, a man named Pyrrhus. He too was a believer in the heresy of Monothelitism.

The two theologians debated hotly. After a long day of discussion, the Patriarch Pyrrhus announced:

“I have defended what is false for many years, but now I must hold that Christ has a human will as well as Divine. Maximus is right, after all. I will follow him to Rome to discuss matters with the Patriarch of Rome. I will request a meeting of patriarchs and bishops, and we will settle this matter once and for all.”

It took many years, and under the Patriarch of Rome, Martin the Confessor, the first Lateran Council took place with several hundred bishops and patriarchs from the East and West. Monothelitism was condemned.

The Byzantine Emperor Constans II (the grandson of Heraclius) did not like this at all: “Arrest Patriarch Martin of Rome! Arrest that son of a dog, Maximus!”

Maximus was locked up for treason and was tortured along with two of his disciples. His tongue and right hand were cut off, and they were exiled.

Several years into exile, Maximus the Confessor died at his monastery in Tsageri. It was August 13th. Three flames appeared above his tomb, and it is understood that God was announcing that Maximus was a beacon of light and understanding for the world. Healings and miracles began to occur as people prayed for his intercession. Although he has been known to heal many sicknesses from poisons to infertility, my favorite miracles of his are his cures of migraines. A migraine is a really bad headache that makes life truly difficult. Imagine how many headaches Maximus must have endured dealing with so many people who didn't want to admit Christ was fully human as well as fully God! Next time you have a headache, remember St. Maximus, who is a doctor of the universal Church. You can ask him for healing, or offer up your own suffering for the sake of people who don't know Christ.