December 31

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Theophilatus of Ocrida (ca. 1054-ca. 1126) pastor and ecumenical witness

Today the Orthodox churches commemorate Theophilatus, an archbishop of Ocrida in what is now Macedonia.
He was born around the year 1054 on the Greek island of Euboea, in the Euripus Channel. A immensely cultured man, he served as deacon and rector in a patriarchal school until the Byzantine emperor named him archbishop of Ocrida, which was the political and cultural center of the Bulgarian-Macedonian empire.
At first, Theophilatus was reluctant to accept what seemed to him to be a sort of exile among people he considered much less cultured than the Byzantines. However, he rose to the task with freedom and creativity, and was a wise pastor who used his education to sow seeds of wisdom and communion among all of the faithful entrusted to his care.
A skilled preacher and Biblical scholar who commented the entire New Testament, Theophilatus also studied the history of the church of Ocrida and taught his faithful to cherish their church's history. He was convinced that only familiarity with history can help heal divisions among people, and instill in them the openness of heart called for in the apostolic writings.
Theophilatus died between 1120 and 1126, after spending his last years using the resources of his mind and heart to try to heal the conflicts between Rome and Byzantium, by urging each side to return to the Gospel.

A READING

Brothers, let us give proof of mercy, so that we will not appear harsh; if we are not harsh, they will welcome us. If we welcome them, we will fill the house with God, and by filling the house with God, we will become richer. And if we are rich, we will demonstrate kindness, and in this way we will show that we are good and faithful servants and we will be welcomed into the Lord's joy. Do you see how far mercy has lifted us up?
Let us not be too insistent regarding the issue of unleavened bread or that of fasting, when we find ourselves faced with the opinion of the Latins. Many people think that they commit unforgivable errors, but my opinion is that an expert in Church history, who has learned that no custom is enough to divide the Church unless it leads to the ruin of dogma, could not agree with that opinion.
Let us not behave in this way, without mercy; let us not transform the height of our dignity into a tower of vanity, we who in our pride refuse almost everyone. To the extent that we are stronger, let us carry the weak, and to the extent that we are doctors, let us heal those who suffer.

From the *Discourses* of Theophilatus of Ocrida

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
John Wycliff (d. 1384), reformer

WESTERN CATHOLICS:
Silvester I (d. 335), pope (Roman and Ambrogian calendars)
Columba of Sens (d. 237), virgin and martyr (Spanish-Mozarabic calendar)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (22 kiyahk/tahsas):
Gabriel, archangel
Bacala Daqsyos (Appearance of the Virgin to Ildephonsus of Toledo; Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:
End of the year
John Wycliff, witness to the faith in England

MARONITES:
Zoticus the Merciful (4th cent.), priest and martyr

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Melania of Rome (d. 439), nun

OLD CATHOLICS:
Marius of Lausanne (d. 594), bishop