

If we need, however, evidence of Vladimir's sincere and total and perfect conversion which took the rest of his life to be completed, as it will each of us, we don't simply find it in the fact that a lot of Russians became Orthodox. We find it in the lives of his two sons, born to him after his conversion to Christianity, Boris and Gleb, who not only did not desire the acquisition of wealth and power, prestige and glory in this life, but who, when presented with the possibility of having everything taken from them, knelt down piously and allowed themselves to be slain like lambs, understanding that their brother Sviatopolk, if he could acquire the throne and the crown in his own name and without opposition, while remaining a pagan, would not molest the young Christian church. But if they resisted, even if they were victorious, that great travail would befall the believers in every place controlled by those of the former pagan religion. And that if they failed, that the church and the spark of Christ's faith would be stamped out to return only long in the future. So they became the first among the saints to achieve the title and honor of "Passion bearers." Not martyrs – they were not killed for their faith – but sharers in the suffering of Christ who said, "Greater love hath no man than this: That he lay down his life for his friends." So they are the crowning glory of St. Vladimir, canonized before he was canonized. When he was canonized it was originally under the title of Basil, his baptismal name, only later was his honorific name at birth, Vladimir, "Ruler of the world," used not any longer as an appellation for him, but as an identification of him with the Pantocrator, the Lord whom he had chosen to serve throughout his life.

Through his prayers may the church be granted peace, unity, and tranquility, and may many from east and west, come and share in the fellowship of Orthodox belief, casting aside twisted faiths, heresies, and errors of old, to enter into the one fellowship with the one, holy, catholic and apostolic church.

In the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, glory to Jesus Christ.

Glory forever.

\*(Excerpted from: [transfigcathedral.blogspot.com](http://transfigcathedral.blogspot.com)– A homily by Fr. Joseph Hirsh)

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## ***Saint Vladimir of Kiev***

**Feast day: July 15**



**Patronage:**

**Russia, converts, parents with large families,  
reformed and penitential murders.**

## ***Saint Vladimir of Kiev***

(Born c. 958-died July 15, 1015 c. at Breslove today part of Kiev, Russia)

\*We know the legend of St. Vladimir, how it is recorded in the primitive narratives, the saga of old Russe. We are aware that he was one of a number of princes of the Nordic tribes that had come down the Dnieper River and settled in that valley, and who had performed the service of pacifying the raging Slavic communities along the riverbank and inland by imposing their tyranny over the local tyranny. We know that he, as a man, had two influences acting on him. One was the religion of his people, which was a variant of the Nordic religion, the worship of the god Perm who was the divinity of food, drink, and of human sacrifice. We also know that his grandmother, the wise Olga who had been herself a sovereign and ruler of one of the towns of the Russe confederation, had gone to Constantinople and embraced Orthodox Christianity, and had come back and had been quietly allowed by her husband, and then by her son, to practice her faith.

At a certain point in St. Vladimir's life, the Spirit came upon him that told him that the way that his people lived, the way they behaved, was not befitting of true human beings. We underestimate the conversion of St. Vladimir if we think of it as simply a change in religious doctrine, or a change of opinion. It was a change entirely, of lifestyle. A change from a life totally dedicated to blood and acquisition of wealth, not even for the sake of enjoyment of the wealth, but its possession, for among the Vikings it was common to hide one's treasure away in a cave, or to send it out to sea in a flaming ship at the time of one's death. It was as important to keep it out of the hands of others as it was to have it in ones own hands. It was from a religion based on each man satisfying his own passions, to a faith that taught there were absolute laws of right and wrong, of good and evil, and that men had to convert. They need not only change their opinions, but they needed to change every aspect of their behavior.

Vladimir's cousin, who was Prince Olaf of Denmark, had already embraced Christianity and was struggling with this metamorphosis from a man of blood, and passion, and violence, of fire and treasure, to a Christian soul. Vladimir was not going to simply follow the example of his grandmother or of his cousin. He was going to find for himself, and so with a spirit of inquiry, he sent out his agents. They encountered at that time the four main religious systems that were offered in that part of the world. They encountered Islam and we're told, cynically sort of by the author of the primitive narrative, that the Moslem's hesitation to drink alcohol or to eat pork was an impediment to them. It may have been a discouragement to them, but it was certainly the similarity between the Islamic lifestyle and that of the Nordic people from whom he descended that put him off. For it was not really changing anything, except what he called his deity to whom he sacrificed human beings, the mode by which he sacrificed them, and the orientation of his daily prayer.

And then his men confronted the Kashars who had newly converted to Judaism, and he found among them a people who admitted themselves that they had disappointed their God and were under a curse from Him; that they were exiles from their own land, and their desire was not so much for the kingdom of heaven as for the restoration of a monarch and the acquisition of access again to a city which they had once possessed. He thought of this as a pathetic, as a sad and tragic story. His agents confronted Roman Catholicism in the empire of the Franks. And they found it to be perfunctory, simple, and unedifying. By this time the low mass had become the norm. Worship was simply watching someone go through gestures, and mumble a few words, and occasionally utter out loud, "Sanctus, Sanctus" or and added to this was the annoyance of the newly invented bellows organ. They reported back to Vladimir that there was this contraption in the church that wheezed terribly and made a sound that distracted their minds and their hearts from prayer. Now this isn't as bad as their thoughts about the Muslims or the adherents of Judaism, but it was enough to make them then go on and follow St. Olga's footsteps to Constantinople, where the church of Agia Sophia, at the divine liturgy, hearing the angelic hymns proclaimed, maybe even some of them in the Slavonic that they understood that had been centuries earlier prepared for their conversion by St. Cyril Methodius, they were carried up into heaven itself, at least in the heart and in the mind and soul. They said, "We knew not whether we were in heaven or on earth, We only know God is among these people." So missionaries came to Kiev and instructed the leading citizens, and mass baptisms took place – probably some of it not entirely willingly. The truth of the legend is found in the account that on the day of his baptism Vladimir had all of the statues of the pagan gods thrown into the Dnieper river. This was questioned by historians, especially of the Soviet era, until with the use of sonar they were able to find all of these gods in the mud at the bottom of the river that had been thrown in that day.

God did not desire, however, that Vladimir should intellectually obtain, comprehend, and accept Orthodoxy as simply a preferable religion, as the one that seemed to offer the fewest downsides and the most upsides. So God allowed blindness to best Vladimir. If he were going to question his choice, this is certainly the event that would have led to it. He might even have said, "Perm has blinded me because I am turning away from offering human sacrifice, and pigs, and beer, and wine to him." Instead, Vladimir quietly, passively, peacefully approached the waters of baptism, there declaring before his baptism, his Orthodox faith. And after emerging from the water, having his eyesight restored as it had been to holy Apostle Paul, giving thanks, he thanked God, not only the God who brought him from the darkness of idolatry to the light of the worship of the one true God, but spared him from twisted and warped versions of ethical monotheism to the true gospel of Jesus Christ and the true faith of the Orthodox.