

**\*\***St. John the Almsgiver (also known as St. John the Merciful) was born in Amathus, Cyprus. He was the son of Epiphanius, the governor of Cyprus. He married at a young age and had children, but soon after both his wife and children all died and he entered the religious life. The Patriarch Theodore died, and the Alexandrians asked that the Emperor appoint John as his successor, which he did. One of his first acts was to make a list of over two thousand persons in need, and he took these people under his special care. St. John referred to the poor as his “lords and masters”, because their mighty influence at the Court of the Most High. He did not turn away anyone in need. He also fought heresy by means of improvements in religious education. He reorganized the system of weights and measures for the sake of the poor, and put a stop to corruption among the officials of his time. He also increased the number of Churches in Alexandria from seven to seventy.

When St. John was a youth, he had a vision of a beautiful maiden with a garland of olives on her head, who said that she was “Compassion”, the eldest daughter of the Great King. This vision made a deep impression on John and now that he had the opportunity of helping on a large scale, he soon became known all over the East for his help towards the poor. Once a person who was not really in need, applied for alms. He was detected by the officers of the palace, but John said, “Give unto him; he may be Our Lord in disguise”. He visited the hospitals three times every week, and he freed a great many slaves while in power. He devoted his entire revenues of his see to the alleviation of those in need.

When the Sassanids sacked Jerusalem in 614, John sent large supplies of food, wine, and money to fleeing Christians. But eventually the Persians occupied Alexandria and John himself in his old age, was forced to flee to his native country where he died. He died in Cyprus in 616 and his body was moved to Constantinople, and then Venice in 1249. Another relic of him was sent to Hungary and placed in the Chapel in Buda Castle which was dedicated to him. Now his body lies in the St. John the Merciful Chapel, in the St. Martin’s Cathedral in Bratislava, Slovakia.

**\*\***(Excerpted from: [www.newmannconnections.com](http://www.newmannconnections.com))

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## **Saint John the Almsgiver**

**Feast Day: January 23**



**Patronage:  
Knights Hospitaller**

# Saint John the Almsgiver

Patriarch of Alexandria  
(556-619)

\*Saint John, born on the Island of Cyprus, was married, but when his wife and two children died he considered it a call from God to lead a perfect life. He gave away all he possessed in alms, and became known throughout the East as the Almsgiver. He was appointed Patriarch of Alexandria; but before he would take possession of his see, he told his servants to comb the town and bring him a list of his lords — meaning the poor. They brought word that there were seventy-five hundred of them, and these he undertook to feed every day.

On Wednesdays and Fridays of every week he sat on a bench before the church, to hear the complaints of the needy and aggrieved; he would not permit his servants to taste food until the wrongs were redressed. A man whom he had helped thanked him for his assistance one day, but he interrupted him, saying: My brother, I have not yet shed my blood for you, as Jesus Christ, my Saviour and my God, commands. On another occasion, after he gave his habit to a poor man who passed by, a person he did not know appeared immediately afterwards and gave him a sack containing a hundred gold pieces. After that, when he gave an alms, he always said, I am going to see whether Jesus Christ will fulfill His promise of giving me a hundredfold. The accomplished promise occurred so many times that he ceased to say these words, which were, in any case, for the benefit of those surrounding him.

Saint John never spoke an idle word. He put out of the church those whom he saw talking, and forbade all detractors to enter his house. He left seventy churches in Alexandria, where he had found but seven.

A merchant received from Saint John five pounds in gold to buy merchandise. Having suffered shipwreck and lost all, he had again recourse to the Almsgiver, who said, some of your merchandise was ill-gotten; and he gave him ten pounds more. But at the next voyage the man lost his ship as well as its cargo. John then said, the ship was wrongfully acquired. Take fifteen pounds of gold, buy grain with it, and put it on one of my ships. This time the merchant was carried by the winds to England, where there was a famine. He sold the grain for its weight in tin, and on his return to Egypt he found the tin changed to fine silver.

Saint John was solicited to come to Constantinople to give his blessing to the emperor Heraclius, about to go to war against pagan neighbors; but the great bishop was called to his reward during the voyage, and died while praying on his knees, in Cyprus, his birthplace. The year was 619. The final resting-place of his relics was Presbourg, a city of Hungary, where they were transferred in 1632.

**Reflection:** Is it not a grace which God gives us, to be able to help the poor, since every assistance given to the least of God's children is considered by Him as a gift to Himself? Let us ask Saint John for greater love for His poor.

\*(Excerpted from: magnificat.ca)