

A Man of Visions

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On May 26 the Church remembers the Apostle Carpus, one of the Seventy sent by the Lord to spread the Gospel through the known world.

Carpus was a friend of Saint Paul. We read his name in 2 Timothy 4: 13, a single verse that shows a kind of homey closeness between them. Paul tells Timothy, when he comes, to "bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments." Paul trusted Carpus to keep and care for his personal possessions—things he needed and valued.

Paul gave Carpus the position of Bishop of Varna in Thrace, an area which includes parts of modern Greece, Bulgaria and Turkey. Carpus also preached in Crete, where he met Dionysius the Areopagite. It is Dionysius who tells us that Carpus received many heavenly visions, especially when he was preparing to serve the Divine Liturgy.

Dionysius recorded what Carpus told him about one vision—the most memorable one he ever had, because it taught him an unforgettable lesson about Jesus Christ. Carpus said that there were two men with whom he was very angry. One of them, not a believer, had "led astray to ungodliness a certain member of the Church." Then both of them did things that harmed and mocked the faith.

Carpus blamed himself for not trying to convert the "leader" and not attempting to bring the former Church member back to the truth. He said that he should have spent the rest of his life warning them that their conduct was putting them in spiritual danger. But in spite of this, he remained angry. He prayed that God would put them to death for what they were doing.

The vision given to Carpus had two parts. When he looked up he saw Jesus Christ surrounded by angels, a scene full of light and beauty. But when he looked down, he saw a "yawning and dark chasm." The two men "upon whom he had invoked a curse" crouched unsteadily on the slippery edge of the chasm, struggling to keep from falling into it. There were serpents "creeping up and gliding from underneath," trying to pull the men down while biting them and piercing their skin.

Carpus admitted that he took a certain pleasure in this terrible scene. Not only that, but as he looked at it he could easily forget the heavenly beauty he'd seen first.

But then he saw Jesus Christ and the angels again. The Lord rose from His "super-celestial throne" and descended, stretching out His hand to pull the two men out of danger. Carpus heard Him say, "Here I am, ready to be crucified again for the salvation of mankind."

Then Christ spoke again, in what seemed to be a warning to Carpus about his own sin—the sin of praying for others to die: "But see, whether it is well for you to exchange the dwelling in the chasm, and with serpents, for [a dwelling] with God, and the good and philanthropic angels."

Kontakion - Tone 4

The Church ever sees you as a shining star, Apostle Carpus.
Your miracles have brought her great enlightenment.
Save those who in faith honor your memory.