

My Beloved Ones,

This summer, I was very moved to read a testimonial from a respected Romanian Orthodox surgeon, who is also a Deacon. During the interview (which you may read [here](#)), when asked how he came to his faith Dr. Stefan Mindea answered in this way:

I owe my grandmother all that I have. She was a simple peasant woman who left school after only four years, yet she possessed a great fear of God. When we moved to the USA, we were poor...so our parents were very busy trying to ensure decent living conditions for the family. [Our granny] took us to church, told us about the power of prayer, and all of us siblings would keep fasts with her... Though we were quite small, we learned...how important it is to be pious, to do good to people around us, and above all to offer our sacrifice to God...Who is so generous to us. These values that we absorbed in childhood have enormously helped me build my relationship with God..."



As I read this, I thought of so many other ladies, who, like Dr. Mindea's grandmother, left their homelands to come to this new country. Uneducated in a secular sense, what these women brought with them was something far greater than worldly knowledge. Just as Dr. Mindea's faith took root in the seed offered by his beloved grandparent, there are countless stories of families throughout our God-Protected Metropolis whose understanding of our Lord and His Word was nurtured by mothers and grandmothers.

This seed which Dr. Mindea allowed to take root in his own heart shall grow into a great Tree, one which is celebrated in this Saturday's feast, the Exaltation of the Holy Cross. For under this symbol, which is, as St. Paul says, "...a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles..." (I Corinthians 1:23) we Orthodox Christians are protected. When we allow the faith of our forefathers and mothers to grow in our hearts, are given shade, rest and refreshment, because we are strong in the knowledge that the Cross of the Crucified and Resurrected Christ is, for Christians, "...the power of God and the wisdom of God." (I Corinthians 1:24).

Deacon Stefan's interview also made me think of another glorious similarity. Deacon Stefan is a renowned Professor and Neurosurgeon; but more importantly he is an Orthodox Christian doctor. He regularly prays while conducting surgeries, and he anoints those who wish it with Holy Chrism. This faithful trusting in God's powers is similar to St. Luke of Crimea, a respected eye-surgeon, who, even during the atheist persecutions by three different Communist governments, refused to perform an

operation without an icon present. Though the interview with Deacon Stefan is a year old, it brought to my mind an announcement I received from His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros, which read that after many years of private veneration, St. Luke of Crimea has been officially recognized by the Ecumenical Patriarchate as a canonized Saint of our Orthodox Church.

My beloved ones, my hope is that as we prepare to celebrate the finding of the True Cross by St. Helen, we recommit ourselves to the simple, but powerful faith that we learned from our own grandmothers and grandfathers; and that like St. Luke of Crimea we remember that our gifts and abilities are not our own, for as the Psalmist says, "*Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to thy name give glory*" (Psalm 115:9).

+ALEXIOS
Metropolitan of Atlanta