

Cyril was born in Jerusalem around the year 315. He was a learned man trained in classical Greek literature as well as the Bible. Ordained to the priesthood by Bishop Maximus of Jerusalem at the age of 30, Cyril was given the important duty of teaching adults as they prepared for Baptism. Three years after ordination, Cyril succeeded Maximus as bishop of the Holy City of Jerusalem.ⁱ

At the beginning of his ministry as bishop, Cyril witnessed a miraculous sign in the sky that helped to sustain his faith in the darkest of days. Cyril and all of Jerusalem saw a cross in the sky reaching from Mount Calvary to Mount Olivet two miles away. Even at midday, the cross was bright enough to be seen for miles: “it continued several hours together visible to our eyes, and brighter than the sun... The whole city, struck with a reverential fear, tempered with joy, ran immediately to the church, young and old, Christians and heathens, citizens and strangers, all with one voice giving praise to our Lord Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, the worker of miracles.”ⁱⁱ

“Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.” (Mt 16:24-25). Just as Jesus carried his cross through the streets of Jerusalem to Calvary, so to did Cyril. As Bishop of Jerusalem, his life was filled with hardship. He served 35 years as a bishop but 16 of those were spent in exile. Arians falsely taught that Jesus was some semi-divine creature of God. Bishop Cyril fought the heresy by teaching that Jesus was “true God from true God.” Unfortunately, what the Arians lacked in proper theology, they made up for in brute force. Cyril was exiled from Jerusalem the first time by Arian heretics. Cyril returned but was then driven back into exile by a Pagan emperor. With the death of that emperor, he returned only to be driven out a third time by an Arian emperor.ⁱⁱⁱ Despite these setbacks, Cyril maintained his composure and continued to fight ignorance with the solid truth of the faith.

Cyril is a Doctor of the Church for his work as a priest teaching the faith to those preparing for baptism. And as a bishop, he instructed the newly baptized. “Both sets of lectures were given at Jerusalem’s Church of the Holy Sepulcher built at the site of Jesus’ tomb.”^{iv}

In the Gospel of John, Jesus teaches: “I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit, because without me you can do nothing” (15:5). Cyril teaches “you were anointed with the oil of exorcism, from the very hairs of your head to your feet, and you were made partakers of the good olive tree, Jesus Christ. For you were cut off from the wild olive tree and grafted onto the good one and were made to share the richness of the true olive tree. The oil of exorcism, therefore, was a symbol of the sharing and the richness of Christ.”^v

Cyril compared the immersion into the waters of baptism with a death to sin and a rising to new life in Christ. His words carried special significance because he preached before the very tomb of Christ:

You were led to the holy pool of divine baptism, as Christ was carried from the cross to the tomb. And each of you was asked whether you believed in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and you made that saving profession, and descended three times into the water, and you ascended again. This also suggests symbolically Christ’s three days of burial.^{vi}

Cyril’s life as a bishop was very difficult, but he understood that Christ was the victor over sin and death. Confident that the Lord was with him, he overcame all obstacles and remained steadfast in his faith. “Remain in my love, says the Lord; whoever remains in me and I in him will bear much fruit” (Jn 15:9b, 5b).

“O God, who through the Bishop Saint Cyril of Jerusalem led your Church in a wonderful way to a deeper sense of the mysteries of salvation, grant us, through his intercession, that we may so acknowledge your Son as to have life ever more abundantly.”^{vii}

ⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-cyril-of-jerusalem-181

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/martyrology_entry.php?n=1157

ⁱⁱⁱ Hahn, Scott; Aquilina, Mike. Living the Mysteries: A Guide for Unfinished Christians. Our Sunday Visitor.

^{iv} Ibid

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Collect Memorial of St Cyril of Jerusalem.