

By the grace of God, from Moscow arrives
the myrrh-streaming Icon of the Mother of God



"THE SOFTENER OF EVIL HEARTS"

**«REJOICE, MUCH-SORROWING MOTHER OF GOD,
TURN OUR SORROWS INTO JOY AND SOFTEN
THE HEARTS OF EVIL MEN!»**

"Softener of Evil Hearts"... What a great deal of hope there is in the name of this Icon: hope that some day justice will triumph on earth, that people will become kind and charitable, will begin to love one another. How difficult that is in our embittered world, and sometimes the mere sight of someone else's suffering is enough to soften our own evil hearts..."

All those who turn to this icon in prayer sense that with the softening of evil hearts comes an easing of spiritual and physical suffering. People come to realize that, when they pray for their enemies before this icon, their feelings of enmity are softened, and that strife and hatred leave, giving way to kindness.

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Why has the miraculous icon «Softner of Evil Hearts» come to us?

With thanks to almighty God for His many mercies bestowed upon our Church in the past year, we rejoice in the historic visit of the miraculous Kursk Icon of the Mother of God to Russia, and the outpouring of piety that greeted it throughout its sojourn there. In turn, we greet with joy the Icon of the Mother of God Softener of Evil Hearts.

On May 2 1998, a girl named Anastasia Basharina was at the glorification of Blessed Matrona of Moscow with her mother. She felt she wanted to purchase this paper mounted icon of the Mother of God. During the glorification of blessed Matrona of Moscow she placed the icon on righteous Matrona's holy relics - a well known

and loved saint of Moscow, who was sightless from birth and crippled from her adolescence. The icon was kept in a Moscow apartment of Margarita Vorobyev, wife of Sergei Leonidovich Fomin (traveller with the icon).

On the occasion of the seating of the newly elected Patriarch Kyrill the Icon began to stream myrrh strongly in the family home, and was later brought to church. The "Softener of Evil Hearts" Icon was present at the election of the new Russian Patriarch, and was seen by witnesses to be damp with myrrh. In this Icon, and in the context of the election of a new

Patriarch, the miraculous appearance of Myrrh does not mean "future death", rather does it point towards healing and the anointing of a chosen servant of God.

The "Softner of Evil Hearts" is unusual in its depiction of the seven swords or "sorrows" of the Mother of God with one sword piercing the heart from below. In Sacred Scripture, the number seven usually indicates something's fullness and abundance. In this case, it is the fullness of that boundless sorrow, pain and

"sickness of the heart" experienced by the Theotokos during her earthly life. Just as Christ would be pierced with nails and a spear, so the soul of the Most-pure One would be pierced by a certain weapon of sorrow

and pain in the heart.

All those who turn to them in prayer sense that with the softening of evil hearts comes an easing of spiritual and physical suffering. People come to recognize that when they pray for their enemies before such icons, their feelings of enmity are softened, and that internecine strife and hatreds abate, giving way to kindness.

The "Softener of Evil Hearts" icon is commemorated on the Sunday of All Saints, although other references commemorate it February 2 / February 15.



Icon That Streams Myrrh and Heals Hearts

Interview with Sergei Fomin, who travels with the icon of the Theotokos “Softener of Evil Hearts.”

Please, tell us about the most memorable instances of divine help you witnessed.

There are many couples now that, for medical reasons, cannot have children. Often, after such couples pray before the icon, they are able to have a baby.

Usually people tell us their stories of healing when we come to a city or church for the second time. I remember how in Yalta a paralyzed teen was brought to the icon. By the evening he was walking. He could not speak, though. When we came there for the second time, his grandmother asked for a drop of myrrh. She said she would put it on the boy’s tongue, and, maybe, he will be able to talk.

A similar case took place in Barnaul. On the feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, a four-year-old girl was brought to the icon. She was paralyzed from birth. Next day, for the first time in her life, the child tried to walk. When we came to Barnaul the following year, the girl’s mother, in gratitude, gave the Mother of God her golden chain and cross.

Just before our departure to the United States, we were told the following story. An eighteen-month-old girl developed herpes of the mouth. The doctor, whom the baby’s mother asked for help, misdiagnosed her. Subsequently, the treatment given to the girl was wrong, and the baby started suffocating. Then, the mother asked for myrrh, and, on her friend’s advice, put the myrrh in the girl’s mouth. That same day, for the first time in many months, the baby went to sleep peacefully. By morning, her mouth was clean, and the remaining few tiny wounds healed quickly.

We cannot read all these stories, described in detail by different people, without tears of gratitude for the Holy Virgin’s gracious help.

We were told about the icon’s assistance in ordinary life as well. In Yaroslavl, a young woman was a member of the “New Generation” sect and did not accept Orthodoxy. At that time, we brought the icon to the Tolga Convent. The woman’s mother came to the icon and prayed that her daughter would come to the icon, too. In the evening they came together to kiss the icon, and the next morning the daughter said she wanted to be baptized. She left the sect and became a churchgoer. Relations between mother and daughter improved.

A moleben was served before the icon in the administrative building of the Chelyabinsk regional government. The mayor of Chelyabinsk received holy baptism at the time of our visit.

In comparison with churchgoers in Russia, Russians living abroad are more reserved, collected, and, in my opinion, less emotional. In silence, people approached the holy image, prayed for awhile, and carefully pressed their small copies of the icon on the original. And then, they stayed a little longer, taking in the heavenly aroma that flowed from the sacred image.

The icon comes not only to large cathedrals, but also to distant villages, country priests and their small parishes – where no sacred thing was ever brought before.



Prayers to the Mother of God before her icon «Softner of Evil Hearts»

First PRAYER

O much-suffering Mother of God, who art higher than all the daughters of the earth in thy purity, and in the multitude of suffering which thou didst bear on earth: accept our sighs of suffering, and keep us under the protection of thy mercy, for we know no other refuge and fervent protection than thee. But as one having boldness before Him Who was born of thee, help and save us by thy prayers, that we may without hindrance attain the Kingdom of Heaven, where with the saints we may sing praises to the One God in Trinity, always, now, and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Second PRAYER

Who shall not call Thee blessed, O Virgin full of grace! Who shall not hymn Thy lovingkindness towards the race of men! We pray unto Thee, we beseech Thee: leave us to not perish in misfortunes; melt our hearts with love and send Thy dart to our enemies so that it may wound our hearts with the peace towards us who persecute us. Even as the world hateth us, do Thou extend Thy love towards us, and even as the world persecuteth us, do Thou accept us and accord us the God-given power of patience to endure without complaint the temptations encountered in this world. O Mistress! Soften the hearts of wicked men who rise against us, lest their hearts should perish in iniquity, but, O Full of Grace, do Thou entreat Thy Son and our God to visit their hearts with peace, so that the devil, the father of evil, may be put to shame. And we, singing Thy lovingkindness towards us, lowly and vile

as we are, shall hymn Thee, O Most Wondrous Mistress, O Virgin full of grace: hearken unto us in this hour, as our hearts are heavy, fend us with peace and love towards one another and towards our enemies, eradicate every wickedness and hostility that we have, as we sing to Thee and to Thy Son, our Lord Jesus Christ:

Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Third PRAYER

I thank Thee, O Master who loves mankind, King of the ages and giver of good things. Thou destroyed animosity and granted peace to all people. Grant now peace to Thy servants, and strengthen Thy fear in them, thus we can love one another. Calm down disagreements, take away scandals caused by gossips. For Thou art our peace, and to Thee we ascribe glory to the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto the ages of ages. Amen.

Troparion, in Tone 5:

Soften our evil hearts, O Theotokos, * and quench the attacks of those who hate us * and loose all the rigidity of our soul. * For looking on thy holy image * we are filled with compunction by thy suffering and loving-kindness for us, * and we kiss thy wounds; * we are filled with horror for the darts with which we wound thee. * Let us not, O Mother of Compassion, * because of the cruelty of our hearts, perish from the cruelty of heart of those near us, ** for thou art in truth the Softener of Evil Hearts.