

Kollyva

(the boiled wheat)

Kollyva (the boiled wheat) is connected with a miracle by St. Theodore of Tyron (a military saint of the Church) dating back to 361 AD when Emperor Julian the Apostate (emperor of Constantinople and ardent supporter of paganism) in an attempt to embarrass the Christians at the beginning of the Great Fast, ordered that all the food set out for sale in the market of Constantinople be sprinkled with the blood of animals sacrificed on the altars of the pagan gods.

St. Theodore appeared in a dream to the Patriarch Eudoxios warning him of the contamination and urging the Christians to boil wheat and eat it for three consecutive days until the sacrificed food spoiled (there was no refrigeration). We celebrate this victory over paganism on the first Saturday of Great Lent. Commemoration of this miraculous event reminds the faithful to honor the fast of Great Lent.

Tradition has connected this celebration with the two preceding Saturdays of the Souls, in which boiled wheat (Kollyva) is also used to remember the dead. The connection between wheat and memorial services is based on the words of Jesus in reference to the resurrection, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies it bears much fruit" John 12:24. The teaching and practice of the Church has thus seen in wheat a symbol of the Christian belief in the resurrection. We add sugar and spices to the boiled wheat thus symbolizing the Church's belief in the sweetness of the Kingdom of God.

The prepared white mound of Kollyva set on a tray bearing a cross and the departed person's initials symbolizes the Christian message of everlasting life and our hope in the joys of God's Kingdom.

Like all things in our Orthodox Church, the ingredients have symbolic meaning too.

Wheat for everlasting life,

Raisins for sweetness,

Walnut and almonds for God's gifts

Pomegranate seeds for plenty and sweetness,

Sugar for the sweetness of heaven, and

Parsley for "the green pastures" of God's Kingdom

Usually, we offer prayers along with kollyva for the deceased on the 40th day after their departure and then again on the 3rd, 6th, 9th and 12th months. After this, it is typical to prepare the Kollyva each year in memory of your departed loved ones around the anniversary of their passing. Other days when special prayers for the departed are offered are on the Saturdays of the Souls.

Memorial services held in the church, accompanied by the preparation of Kollyva, are opportunities to offer prayers for the souls of our departed loved ones hoping in the mercy and loving-kindness of God. These are also opportunities of our own bereavement and attaining of peace as we surrender our loved ones in the hands of God.

References: A Dictionary of Greek Orthodoxy by Rec. Nikon D. Patrinacon

A Guide to Greek Traditions and Customs in America by Marilyn Rouvelas

The Orthodox Church: 455 Questions and Answers by Stanley s. Harakas

See also our church website at: <http://www.holytransfiguration.info/kollyva/>