

*O holy Father Raphael, thou didst incarnate the love of Christ Jesus from thy youth, O son of the Church of Antioch sent to America. Not being concerned with thine own ease, thou wast Apostle to the lost sheep of Syria. From holy Russia thou didst come, traveling from east to the west and from the north to south, and didst give thyself no repose, but labored night and day. As thou hast boldness before God, intercede with Him to save our souls.*

*—From the Stichera*

*I am an Arab by birth, a Greek by primary education, an American by residence, a Russian at heart, and a Slav in soul.*

*— St Raphael*

It would be an understatement to say that St Raphael travelled extensively. Moreover, this was done for the love of Christ Jesus; he followed the Great Shepherd to become Shepherd to the Lost Sheep of America.

While in his mother's womb, St Raphael's family fled Damascus to escape Muslim persecution. (St Joseph of Damascus was martyred in this persecution.) Holy Raphael was born in Beirut on the Feast of the Archangels on November 8, 1860, and named after "one of the seven holy angels who present the prayers of the holy ones [saints] and enter before the glory of the Holy One" (Tobit 12.15). Young Raphael showed an aptitude for learning and enrolled at the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Theological School at Halki, and was ordained a deacon in 1885. He returned to Syria and ministered under Patriarch Gerasimus I.

St Raphael furthered his education at the Kiev Theological Academy in 1888. He was ordained a priest in 1889 and served as the head of the Antiochian metochion (embassy church). He tirelessly advocated for the Antiochian Church to be able to choose an Arab Patriarch. (For over a century, the Antiochian Patriarchs were Greeks from Constantinople.) He later took up a teaching position in Kazan, assisting missionary efforts among the central Asians.

In 1895, St Raphael received a letter to be the pastor for Syrians in New York. He accepted the call and made arrangements to travel to America. Upon his arrival in New York, Raphael set about organizing a parish for the Orthodox Syrians.

He received word of other Orthodox Syrians in America and frequently travelled the country (and on one occasion into Mexico) to minister to them, performing baptisms, chrismations, and weddings, and hearing confessions. He was able to set up mission churches in several places, ministering to the Orthodox of all ethnicities. Like the Son of Man, St Raphael often had no place to rest his head (Matthew 8.20).

In New York, St Raphael was able to acquire a church building and remodel it as an Orthodox temple. This was consecrated as St Nicholas Church in 1902 by the only bishop in America at the time, St Tikhon. St Tikhon was impressed with the labors of Fr Raphael and he became the first bishop concredited on American soil in 1904.

One of St Raphael's great concerns was with Orthodox Christian education. To this, he spearheaded many educational initiatives. One of the most important was realizing that the children of immigrants would speak English as their primary language, he encouraged use of English in the Divine Liturgy. In 1905 started the magazine *The Word*, with a section for English-language articles.

In all this, St Raphael, worked tirelessly for his flock and sought no honor for himself. He wore himself out in labor for Christ and his Church. After a long illness, St Raphael passed to glory on February 27, 1915. He was glorified (recognized as among the holy ones) on May 29, 2000.

O Holy Raphael, pray for us.

*O Son of God, Who art wondrous in the saints, save us who sing to Thee. Alleluia.*