

Sts. Cyril and Methodius

You can't go too many places in Eastern Europe without running into the names Sts. Cyril and Methodius on signs or in icons or portrayed in statues. These Greek brothers from Thessalonica led a missionary journey that forever changed the lives of millions of people. They brought Orthodox Christianity to many areas of Eastern Europe and developed the Glagolitic alphabet, a precursor of the Cyrillic alphabet used in many Eastern European countries to this day. They translated the Gospels, the service books, the nomocanon, the psalms and most of the Old Testament into the Slavic language. Their missionary approach would influence later Orthodox missionaries in the Far East and North America. They led what many would consider to be the most successful Orthodox missionary journey in history.

Before Sts. Cyril and Methodius went on their missionary journey to evangelize Central Europe, they were first sent on a missionary expedition to the Khazars by the Byzantine emperor and the Patriarch of Constantinople. Here they miraculously uncovered the relics of St. Clement of Rome, which they would later bring as a gift to the pope when they appeared before him to explain their use of the Slavonic language in the Divine Liturgy. Prior to Sts. Cyril and Methodius's translation of the service books into Church Slavonic, the only languages that the liturgy could be celebrated in were Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. Through the dialogue of Sts. Cyril and Methodius with Pope Adrian, the West was able to accept that the liturgy and services could be celebrated in the local language of the people and not always in Latin, as they had been accustomed to doing. This practice of celebrating the liturgy and services in the local language of the people became the precedent in the Orthodox East.

While on their trip to visit the pope in Rome, St. Cyril passed away and was immediately considered a Saint by his disciples and eventually among all the peoples he had helped evangelize. St. Methodius would live 16 more years after the death of his brother and would suffer much at the hands of those who opposed Orthodoxy and the Church Slavonic language. He eventually was named an archbishop, but this still didn't stop his mistreatment at the hands of those who opposed the gospel of Christ, even from within the clergy. Yet, despite the difficulties and setbacks, Sts. Cyril and Methodius's missionary journey still bears fruit to this day as the people of Central Europe continue to raise their voices in prayer and pray in their Slavic tongue from books written in the Cyrillic alphabet, just as Sts. Cyril and Methodius taught them many years ago.