

Today is the Memorial of St. John Damascene, also known as St. John of Damascus.

John was an Arab Christian who served as an administrator in the court of the Caliphate in the area of modern-day Syria.

Among the Christians who lived in the Muslim world, there was a mixing of Islamic ideas with Christian ideas, resulting in the arising of certain heresies.

St. John Damascene wrote extensively against the heresy of Iconoclasm, which sought to prohibit the veneration of icons - images of Jesus Christ, and the saints.

John's defense of holy images brought him under persecution by the authorities. And after painting an icon of the Blessed Virgin Mary, his hand was cut off. Miraculously, it was restored after fervent prayers before the very icon he was punished for producing.

In the Gospel, we hear of Jesus miraculously restoring the sight of two blind men. The blindness of these men is brought about through their faith ... in a similar way the miraculous restoration of the hand of St. John Damascene worked against the spiritual blindness of the iconoclasts.

In the Book of Genesis, we hear that God created people in His own image and likeness. And as a reflection, we can consider whether our own treatment of others honors that image of God in all people.

Let us ask for the grace to recognize the *imago Dei*, the image of God in all the people we meet ... today, this week, and in the future. So that as we prepare our hearts during this Advent season, we may "ready the way of the Lord" within ourselves.