



■ From the “Synaxarion” of people living in the world

Forgiveness*

The Astonishing Power of Life in Christ

Many years ago, after the civil war in Greece (in the 1940s), a murder was committed in a village, presumably for political reasons and owing to the terrible fanaticism of the times.

A villager, Peter G., was accused of the crime, put on trial, and, following the testimony of five fellow villagers, sentenced to thirty years in prison.

The defendant constantly maintained his innocence. He was sent to a rural prison, but day and night would both clamor and mumble to himself that he was not guilty of the crime.



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A very devout Priest visited the prison once a month to celebrate the Divine Liturgy in the chapel, and then would meet any of the prisoners who wished to see him for confession.

After five or six months, Peter went to the Priest, and before God and under the Confessor’s *Epitrachelion* (Priestly stole), he swore that he was innocent.

From that time on, Peter G. completely changed his behavior and became a man of prayer, and would diligently read the New Testament given to him by the kindly Priest.

In one year’s time, he was so altered that his fellow inmates—



and even the major offenders—began to respect him and treat him amicably.

By God's Grace and enlightenment, the devout Priest quickly became convinced of Peter's innocence and allowed him to partake of Holy Communion every time he celebrated the Liturgy at the prison.

The Priest attempted to get him legal assistance, but the witnesses were absolutely categorical in their accusations, claiming to have been present when the murder was committed.

The Confessor nevertheless believed that he was truly innocent and that he had been framed.

For his part, Peter G. occupied himself with the Jesus Prayer—which he had read about in the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*—and continued to study the Holy Scriptures and partake of Holy Communion, all the while treating his fellow inmates with great kindness.

What is more, he forgave his accusers and even the unknown murderer with all his heart.

"It's not their fault," he would say. "Political and ideological passions are to blame, and also the devil who darkened their minds and made them conceal the truth. Lord, forgive them... and I also forgive them... Bestow upon them riches and every good thing, but first and foremost grant them enlightenment and good health."

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Nineteen years passed in this manner. Then, thanks to his impeccable behavior and his having served time in a rural prison, where sentences could be reduced, he was released.

He was then fifty years old.

Peter was not accepted back in his village, however, since everyone, and especially the relatives of the murdered man, believed he was guilty of the crime.

So he moved to a neighboring town and worked in construction and as a carpenter, a craft he had learned in prison.

He continued to live as a true Christian, with conscientious



participation in the Mysteries of the Church, with correct adherence to the commandments of the Gospel, and especially with prayer. Prayer was the oxygen of his life. The Jesus Prayer and the New Testament were his “bread of life” and “water of life.”

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A woman of forty-two, a theology teacher at a local *Gymnasium* (secondary school), was told by the prison’s Confessor—who also happened to be her own spiritual Father—about Peter G.’s story, and especially how dedicated he was to Christ and His Church. She went to find him and eventually asked him to marry her! Two healthy children came from this blessed marriage.

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A few years later, in the village where the murder had taken place, someone fell seriously ill with unexplainable, excruciating pain all over his body. The doctors, with all their advanced technology and examinations, could not provide any help. They could not even determine the cause of the illness.

So then, after returning one night from the hospital in this terrible state, the man began screaming in his excruciating pain that he himself was the murderer, and that, along with the four false witnesses whom he had paid off, he had falsely accused Peter G., who just happened to be passing by at the time of the murder.

The police were summoned and the man signed a confession, naming the four false witnesses and accomplices. What legal procedures followed, I do not know.

His confession hit the village like a lightning bolt, causing confusion and agitation, and incurring many curses on the murderer. His soul refused to depart as he lay shrieking in pain.

As was to be expected, Peter G. heard tell of the unfolding events. He did not, however, take any legal action to restore his honor through a new trial, nor did he press charges against the offenders. What then did he do? He went to the murderer’s home!

Everyone froze. When they saw him crossing through the village, most of the villagers hid themselves in their shame. The murderer also froze when the two came face to face, and with



eyes open wide with astonishment and horror, he heard him say:

“George, I forgive you with all my heart. And I thank you, because you were the cause of my coming to know Christ and His Church and the Holy Mysteries. I pray that

you also come to know Him, with repentance and prayer!

He hugged and kissed him and left, as tears quietly fell from his eyes.

The triumph of God’s justice had arrived, after thirty-five years! But this was also a triumph of Peter’s trust and faith in the Providence of God and of his unceasing praying, as well as a crown of glory for the patience and forbearance he demonstrated all those years.

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Peter’s life after that was blessed, as we already mentioned, with a Christian marriage and a family that was “a small church in the home,” with two blessed children. And indeed, after the wholehearted forgiveness he granted and the love he showed everyone, he had the Grace of God, the blessing of the Theotokos, the protection of the Saints, and the help of the Holy Angels.

He reposed in peace at the age of eighty in 1999. The Priest from the prison, then in his nineties, was present at his funeral and told me this story. He assured me that shortly before Peter’s repose Angels and Archangels filled his room, seen only by the dying man and the Priest himself. And it was the Holy Angels who came to take his soul, after Peter made the sign of the Cross over himself one last time, saying:



“My Guardian Angel! My Angel, I do not deserve this honor... And saying these words, he reposed.

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Following his tremendous and unjust tribulation and hardships in prison, side by side with serious offenders, this man,

though he was married and lived in today's world, reaped the fruits of the Jesus Prayer, of Holy Communion, and of a life following the precepts of the Gospel. His married life did not obstruct him from saying the Jesus Prayer night and day, as he had learned it from the book *The Way of a Pilgrim*.



*“I have found a good way to
fall asleep at night...
I forgive them all, one by one.”*
Tasos Leivadites

(*) **Protopresybter Stephan K. Anagnostopoulos**, *The Jesus Prayer in the World* (Piraeus: 2007), pp. 62-65. Translated by Marianthi Toumpa from the original Greek.