



■ A Living Icon of Meekness in Orthodox Romania

## My Mother\*

“...her love for God, her kindness,  
and her modesty...”

**T**hroughout her entire life [recounts Elder Petroniu] my mother lived a profound spiritual life. She took part with great devotion in all the Feasts of the Church, down to the last. Of course she had no book learning, but what she did have was discernment and intuition. She had no knowledge of the Festal Cycle of the Church, yet she participated unerringly in all of its Feasts, fasts, and annual commemorations of the dead.

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**Almsgiving** was her primary concern on nearly a daily basis. She would invite in strangers from off the street, offer them hospitality at our house, and gave them every comfort. Never did a poor person leave our house with empty hands. My father sometimes berated her for her great open-handedness.

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**M**y mother took part in memorial services for the dead with great piety. Every Saturday morning, she gave additional alms on behalf of the departed: a bowl of milk or food and water, which she would bring to the neighbors herself.

She would then busy herself with washing clothes for the next day, after which she would cook the meal that we would eat after the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, since she never cooked on the Lord's Day.

When the bell rang for Vespers, all of the work



for the following day had been completed, and thus Sunday began.

**O**n Sunday morning we would all put on our clean clothes and go to Church.

**O**ur father would rise very early in the morning to say his prayers, after which he would read the Akathist Hymn to our Lord Jesus Christ from the Horologion, followed by passages from the New Testament.



**B**efore leaving for Church, we would first ask forgiveness one of another: “Forgive me” and “God forgives.” **W**e did so not only amongst ourselves, but also with our neighbors.

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**A**ll of us—including the children, even if they were sick—devoutly and diligently kept the fast on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, as well as the longer fasts. **G**reat Lent was a very important time in the Christian life of all of us. **W**e had special bowls, plates, and silverware set aside just for this time. **A**t Pascha and the Nativity, the celebrations would last for many days in the villages.

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**My mother** was an unparalleled housekeeper. **S**he was the one who would sew, weave on the loom, and knit. **S**he made all our clothes herself: shirts, coats, sleeveless overcoats, jackets, as well as rugs and various covers for our beds. **S**he raised eight children—six girls and two boys—nurturing in us the fear of God, respect for others, and a sense of honor. **S**he did not hesitate to give us a beating sometimes, when we would upset the order of her “coenobium.”

**P**ietty, faith, and the fulfillment of our traditional Christian duties became habitual to us. **T**hey sprang forth from her very being, just as did her love for God, her kindness, and her moderation.

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**O**nce, when I was in the city of Broșteni, I went to our house in order to stay for Pascha, and remembered our Christian customs, which I had not seen again since my childhood.

**I** was able to have a conversation with my mother, which helped me to understand just how profoundly Christian her life actually was.

**O**n Great Thursday I left the house in the morning, and when I returned and asked what she had done that day, I learned to my astonishment that she had gone to an ailing elderly woman in order to wash her



feet, in imitation of the humility of Christ before the Mystical Supper. “**T**he Lord washed the feet of His Disciples and I should not do something for Him? **I** did something similar. **I** washed the feet of Gabriel’s wife, Maria, who is bedridden, and I put on her a new pair of our own socks.”

**O**n Great Friday, her eyes welled with tears the entire day. “**W**hen I think,” she told me, “how greatly our Lord Jesus Christ suffered for our sakes, I want to cry and groan from pain.”

**O**n Great Saturday, when we admired the Paschal breads and biscuits that she was baking for the Feast, she told us: “**I** made them so nicely not so that you would enjoy eating them (because I myself do not even feel like touching them), but first and foremost for the glory of our Lord, Who tomorrow will be resurrected.”

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**I**n her old age, even though she suffered from various ailments, she was never absent from Church.

The village women had the custom of kissing the hands of the elderly and the widows and of putting money in their hands. **O**nce, my mother asked me whether she did well in accepting the money.

She told me: “**I** never spend that money on myself, but instead buy candles and light them in front of the Icon of our Lady the Theotokos.

**A**nd at home I do ten prostrations for each coin, praying for the health of the person who gave it to me.”

**A**nother time, I wanted to learn what my mother knew of the teaching of the Church. **S**he then recited for me the Symbol of Faith [the Creed] and the vision of the Panagia and her Epistle, all of which she knew by heart. **S**he also knew entire passages from the Holy Gospel and the Psalter, and recited for me Psalm 49. **S**he knew by heart many prayers, troparia, and verses from various Feast Days, which she had learned in Church. **I** was astonished by all of this because she had not given me the impression that she knew these things, but kept them devoutly to herself.

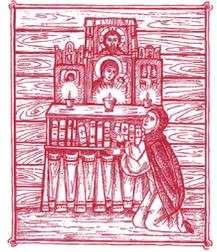
She was always at prayer. **B**efore we would leave the house, we would always see her go to the Icon corner. **S**he would make the sign of the Cross and a few prostrations, and then set about her work. **S**he would pronounce the name of Jesus Christ



and of our Lady the Theotokos with great spiritual warmth, trust, and unshakable hope in God's help.

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**L**ong before her death she had already prepared everything. Her funeral garment, the shroud for the coffin, and a bundle of candles were tucked away in her trunk.



**A** few weeks before her repose, I went to see her again and brought her a bundle of pure wax candles. That gave her great joy. She put them in her trunk and that is how I had the opportunity to see what it contained.

She passed into eternity on July 4, 1967, after an illness of a few months.

Even before the Sts. Peter and Paul Fast, she requested of my sister Glykeria: “Call for Father Ionika to confess me and to give me Holy Communion.”

She fasted for three days, confessed, and communed. On Saturday, July 1, she washed herself, changed her clothing, combed her hair, and said to Glykeria:

“Cover me with the sheet, because you see how three women in white are coming down the street.”

“Where are they, mama?” Glykeria asked her, as she peered through the window without seeing anyone.

“Never mind. They are coming for me and not for you....”

One night shortly before her death she had a dream about Demetrios, her young son who died before the rest of us, and on whose account she was always inconsolable. The child was wearing a white shirt, with his head uncovered, and was gathering flowers in a large meadow.

“What are you doing here?” she asked him.

“I am gathering flowers,” her son replied.

“And why is your head uncovered? I put a cap on you.”

“We have no need for such things here,” her son said joyfully.

After taking Holy Communion, her face was transfigured. She no longer ate anything, but only asked for water, since she was burning with fever. She was then filled with a great joy, such as she had never displayed before, and began to sing the Troparia that she had learned in Church: “Christ is Risen,” “All ye that have been baptized unto Christ,” “Thy Nativity, O Christ our God,” the Troparion of Pentecost, and



others. **S**he prayed without ceasing: “Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me a sinner. Mother of our Lord, have mercy on me a sinner.” “O Lord, rebuke me not in Thy anger, nor chasten me in Thy wrath,” Psalm 50, and she repeated constantly: “Received, O Lord, those who come to Thee, and then receive me also....”



**T**he day and night before Tuesday, she did not sleep at all, but prayed constantly in a whisper. **S**he then said to Glykeria: “**D**o a proper Memorial Service for me with kollyva, prosphora, and flowers, and... impart to Father [Petroniu] the remission of my sins, for him to have as a token of remembrance from his mother....”

**O**n Tuesday morning, July 4, when the first rays of sun streamed through her bedroom window, she asked Glykeria for the candle, opened her eyes, and whispered: “**F**orgive me!” after which she turned on her side and fell asleep once and for all.

**H**er soul flew out of the earthen vessel of her body, which had undergone such sufferings and hardships. **H**er face was peaceful and a smile was on her lips.

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**S**he lived approximately eighty-seven years, thirty-nine of which with her husband and the remaining twenty-five as a widow. **S**he was born on September 8, 1880, married in January of 1903, and died on July 4, 1967.

**M**y father was born in 1873 and died on August 1, 1942.

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(\*) Elder Petroniu Tanase, *Icons of Meekness* (Ekdoseis: *Orthodox Kypsele*, 2004), pp. 95-101. • Translated here from the Greek.

• This text was discussed during a parish gathering at the Church of Sts. Constantine and Helen, Diocese of Stockholm, on Sunday, May 23, 2016 (Old Style). • The discussion and analysis of the text was led by His Eminence, Metropolitan Cyprian of Oropos and Phyle, who was in Sweden for the Patronal Fest of the Church together with a group of pilgrims from Greece.