



EDIFICATION AND CONSOLATION

“But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men for edification and exhortation and consolation”
(I Corinthians 14:3)

Simple Catechism Through the Experience of the Orthodox Church

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■ **“Through thee may we be delivered from adversities!”**

The Love For Mankind of the Theotokos*

“Why, my child, do you disrespect me?”

In 1931, shortly before the Feast of the Dormition of the Theotokos, three groups of fishermen from the village of Piso Libadi, on the island of Paros, would spend their nights fishing in the strait between Paros and Naxos.

One evening, one of the groups remained in the small harbor.

The fishermen began to drink and make merry, which soon enough led to squabbling and swearing.

Even the Panagia was not left unabused by the blasphemers.

The coastguards and storekeepers at the small harbor tried in vain to restrain them.

Suddenly the sky grew dark. The sea began to roar. Within half an hour, the waves had reached a great height, dragging the fishing boats out to sea before casting them back onto the shore in pieces.

The sea then grew calm, and a small boat from Naxos sailed in to the harbor.

The captain was amazed to see the wreckage on the shore. “How did that happen?” he asked. “I have been sailing on a perfectly calm sea!”

“It was a miracle of the Panagia,” explained one of the fishermen.

Most of the others agreed. Two or three of the fishermen,



however, grew sarcastic and gave a different explanation:

“It was a whirlwind. It’s a good thing it didn’t lift our boats clear up to the clouds.”

One of them, Gregorios Liakouras, went so far as to say:

“Oh, come on now, where was the miracle!

As if the Panagia — and I refrain from repeating his expletive — would really want to mess with us fishermen....”

Having said that, he went to see what damage his own boat had suffered. He found it “smashed to smithereens.” Enraged, he spat on the wreckage, again blasphemed the Panagia, and went home to go to sleep.

As soon as he lay down, he beheld the Panagia as if in a dream, though he was fully awake. She approached him and said:

“Why, my child, do you disrespect me?”

“What are you talking about, lady?” he angrily replied. “I don’t even know you. When did I show you any disrespect?”

“You do not know who I am? Then why do you blaspheme me all the time?”

At these words, Gregorios bolted upright. He tried to call out, to run, but could not. It was as if he were up to his knees in sand. He made the sign of the Cross, and then it was that he clearly saw the Panagia, who told him:

“Come to my house, to the *Ekatontapiliane* [the Church of One Hundred Doors] in Parikia, Paros. Come and venerate me there.”

Gregorios took off immediately, practically running. He reached the Church a little after sunrise and ran straight to the Icon of the Theotokos, where

he recognized the woman in his vision.

Kneeling, he remained in prayer for hours. He then returned to Piso Livadi, where he discovered yet another miracle: The fishing boats were on the shore unscathed!



(*) Protoperbyter Demetrios Athansiou and Presbytera Charoula Tsouliae, *Panton Anasa* [in Greek] (Athens: Ekdoseis “Athos,” 2009), pp. 361-317.

■ “Let us not be remiss!”

“Whom He begat, He Nourishes with Himself”*

The Divine Eucharist

Consider with what sort of honor thou wast honored and of what sort of Table thou art partaking.



That which the Angels behold and tremble, and dare not so much as to gaze upon with-

out awe on account of the radiance that cometh thence, with this we are fed, with this we are commingled, and we are made **one body and one flesh with Christ.**

“Who shall declare the mighty works of the Lord and cause all His praises to be heard?”

What shepherd feeds his sheep with his own limbs? And why do I say shepherd? There are often mothers that after the travail of birth send out their children to other women as nurses.

But He endureth not to do this, but **Himself feeds us with His own blood, and by all means entwines us with Himself.**

Mark it: He was born of our substance. But, you say, this does not have a bearing on all men; though it certainly does concern all. For if He came unto our nature, it is quite plain that it was to us all; and if to all, then to each one. And how was it, you say, that all did not reap the benefit thereof? This was not of His doing, Whose choice it was to do this on behalf of all, but the fault of them that were not willing. For with each one of the faithful doth He mingle Himself in the Mysteries, and whom He begat, He nourishes with Himself, and putteth not out to another; by this also persuading thee again, that He had taken thy flesh.

Let us not then be remiss, having been

■ The sheepskin of compassion

The Divine Blessing*

How It Comes and How It Is Lost

Our story takes place in Drama, Greece, during the dark years of the Nazi German occupation. The winter of 1941 was extremely harsh.

One of my neighbors, Thanases (Athanasios) the cobbler, set off one bitterly cold morning to go to his little shop. It was after 8:30 a.m., when it was permitted to circulate.

He had a good habit: Before going to work, he would stop by the Church of St. Nicholas in the town square, light a candle, and venerate the Icons.

Arriving at the Church this particular morning, he saw a half-naked man sitting on the steps, shivering from the fierce cold.

"Help me," he said. "I am freezing to death."

Without a second thought, Thanases took off the old sheepskin he was wearing and wrapped it around the stranger.

"Thank you very much," he said. "May God's blessing be on your larder!"

Thanases went into the Church and searched for a candle to light, but could not find any. After venerating the Icons, he exited the Church, making the sign of the Cross.

Before heading off to his shop, he looked around for the unfortunate man, but did not see him anywhere. What is more, the sheepskin was lying on the steps!

Bewildered, he looked right and left, and not see-

counted worthy of so much of both love and honor. See ye not the infants, with how much eagerness they lay hold of the breast and with what earnest desire they fix their lips upon the nipple?

Let us also approach this Table with such great eagerness, and the nipple of the spiritual Cup; or rather, with much more eagerness let us, as infants at the breast, draw out the Grace of the Spirit. **Let it be our only sorrow not to partake of this food.**

(*) St. John Chrysostomos, Homily LXXXII on the Gospel of St. Matthew XXVI, 26-28. Translated by George Prevost and revised by M.B. Riddle. From *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 10. Edited by Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888.) Publication layout ours.

ing anyone, he bent down, picked it up, and put it back on his shoulders, since he was also trembling from the cold.

The sheepskin was now as warm as a steam bath, as he would later say.



* * *

No one entered his shop that day on account of the bitter cold. At three o'clock, he pulled down the shutters and pensively set off for home.

"My God, what will we have to eat today? There are my three children, my wife, a sick granny, my mother-in-law, and so many others.... And what about this sheepskin, which is keeping me so warm? And what became of the old man? Why did he get up and leave so suddenly?"

With these thoughts in mind, he arrived home. The house was warm and the table laid with dishes of fried dough.

"Where did all this come from?" he asked in astonishment.

"Come and see!" his wife replied. "Look in our little larder! When I went into it this morning, I found this large pot filled with cornmeal and this bottle filled with oil. And not only that, but under the stairs there were two armloads of firewood: just enough to get us through this cold winter day. I wonder, how did all these things get here? Who brought them here, Thanases?"

And that good Christian man replied:

"God alone works miracles, my wife. But see that you don't say a word about it, or else we will lose the Divine blessing...."

* * *

And so there was no lack of flour, oil, salt, and firewood during those frightful days of the Occupation.

But not for long. Only fourteen months. Because that was how long Thanases' hapless wife kept silent about the blessing from God. As soon as she boasted to her neighbors that she was helping them from the goods that God sent to their larder, the Divine gift came to an end.

(*) Protopresbyter Stefanos K. Anagnostopoulos, *Spiritual Reflections on the Beatitudes* [in Greek] (Piraeus: 2009) pp. 246-248.

■ At the Monastery of Philotheou (Mt. Athos)

The Providence of the *Glykophilousa**

“The *Panagia* will not abandon us...”

During the German Occupation, the supply of wheat had almost run out at the Holy Monastery of Philotheou, so the Fathers **decided to stop giving hospitality.**



When the pious Elder, Father Sabbas, learned of this, he was very grieved and urged the council of Elders not to take such an action, lest **they sadden Christ and be deprived of His blessing from their monastery.**

He also gave them many examples from Holy Scripture, such as the widow of Zarephath's hospitality to the Prophet Elias, and in the end the Fathers listened to his advice.

Every so often, however, they would bother Elder Sabbas, saying, for example:

“We are out of flour. Now what?”

The Elder would answer them:

“Good Fathers, let us eat the little that remains together with the people, and the *Panagia* will not abandon us.”

There remained only twenty-five okas [one oka is approximately 1¼ kilograms (2¾ pounds)] of wheat in the monastery storehouse and nothing else. The Fathers began taunting Elder Sabbas:

“Well now, Father Sabbas, the wheat has finished. And what do we do now?”

The pious old Elder, full of faith, would answer:

“My good people, do not lose your hope in our *Glykophilousa* [“the Sweet-kissing”: a wonderworking Icon of the Mother of God treasured at the monastery]. Grind the twenty-five okas of wheat, bake bread with it, and distribute it to the Fathers and the laymen, and God will take care of us like a good Father.”

Just when their bread finished, and before they even grew hungry, a sea captain from Kavala arrived at the Monastery of Philotheou and asked for firewood in exchange for wheat.



At the Monastery of Iveron (Mt. Athos)

The Blessing of God Comes When We Give Blessings*

Christ the Beggar

«ΕΥ ΔΟΥΛΕ
ΑΓΑΘΕ
ΚΑΙ ΠΙΣΤΕ...»



Elder Sabbas from the Monastery of Philotheou told me how, during the famine of 1917, the Fathers of the Monastery of Iveron, seeing their storehouses emptying, **cut back on their customary hospitality.**

In fact, a particularly tight-fisted monastery Elder got his way and completely discontinued it.

Consequently, Christ also put an end to His every blessing on the monastery.

The Fathers then began to go hungry and to complain to Christ and the *Panagia* that They did not take care of Their monastery. Unfortunately, the monks did not understand their error.

One day, then, Christ appeared to the monastery's doorkeeper in the form of a poor man and asked for a little bread.

Saddened, the doorkeeper replied:

“We do not have any bread, my brother, which is why we have stopped giving hospitality. Wait a moment, though, and I will bring you the piece of bread I have in my cell for myself.”

Beholding the manifest providence of the *Panagia*, who took care of her monastery as a good Mother looks after her children, they all gave thanks to God.

More than anyone else, of course, Elder Sabbas glorified God and thanked the *Panagia*, just as he constantly rendered her thanksgiving by his holy way of life.

The Elder would repeat to the Fathers:

“Did I not tell you, blessed ones, that the *Panagia* would not abandon us?”



He went to his cell and brought his own piece of bread and gave it to Him.

But then he saw the face of the Beggar become radiant.

He took the piece of bread and said to the doorkeeper:

“Do you know why this misfortune has befallen the monastery? Because **you expelled from your monastery both “give” and “receive.”**”

With those words, He vanished in a brilliant light that dazzled the doorkeeper.

In his fright, the doorkeeper ran to the monastery Elders and recounted what had happened.

At first, the Fathers were at a loss to remember what people they had expelled.

Eventually, however, they understood that the Beggar was none other than Christ Himself, and they understood His words from His Gospel: “Give, and it shall be given unto you.”

They repented of their error, and **as soon as they began giving to the poor from the little they had, God sent upon them His abundant blessings.**



(*) Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, published by the Convent of the Evangelist John the Theologian (Souroti, Thessaloniki: 1998). pp. 136-137. Translated from the original Greek.

(*) Elder Paisios of Mt. Athos, *Athonite Fathers and Athonite Matters*, published by the Convent of the Evangelist John the Theologian (Souroti, Thessaloniki: 1998). pp. 135-136. Translated from the original Greek.

■ The followers of the Severan Monophysite heresy

■ Prerequisites: Fasting and Prostrations

A Miracle of the Theotokos On Behalf of Cosmiana*

“You are not one of ours”

Anastasios, Priest and treasurer at the Church of the Resurrection of Christ, told us that Cosmiana, the wife of Germanos the Patrician, came one night, wishing to worship alone at the Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ, the true God.

When she approached the Sepulchre, the Theotokos, surrounded by other women, met her in visible form, and said to her:

“**Since you are not one of us, you are not to come in here, for you are not one of our own**”(the woman was a follower of the heresy of Severos Akephalos**).

She begged for permission to enter, but the Theotokos said to her:

“**Believe me, my woman: you shall not come in here until you are in communion with us.**”

The woman realized that it was because she was a heretic that she was being refused entry, and that she would not be allowed in until she joined the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of Christ our God. She sent for the Deacon, and when the Holy Chalice arrived,



she partook of the Holy Body and Blood of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ; and thus she was counted worthy to worship unimpeded at the Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre of our Lord Jesus Christ.

(*) *The Spiritual Meadow of John Moschos*, Ch. 48 Cistercian Publications (Kalamazoo, Michigan: 1992), p. 39. Publication lay-out ours.

(**) Severos was the Monophysite Patriarch of Antioch. His deposition by Justin I in 518 led to a schism which carried his name.

The Theotokos As a Teacher of Letters*

“My Son, help this child...”



The renowned Elder Hadji-George was born in 1809 in the village of Kermil in Cappadocia. His parents' names were Jordan and Maria, and his baptismal name was Gabriel.

The night before his repose, he was very weak and communed of the Holy Mysteries. The next day, December 18, 1886, he communed again. Shortly thereafter, having asked forgiveness and the blessing of all of his disciples present, Hadji-George gave up his soul in peace to the Lord.

When he was young he was very distressed that he could not learn to read and write. Seeing him upset, his parents told him:

“**Gabriel, go to Church and pray to the Most Holy Theotokos. She will help you learn!**”

At their parish Church there was a wonder-working Icon of the Mother of God. **After fasting three days and making one thousand prostrations**, he went by night to the Church so that no one would find out. **Kneeling** before the doors of the Church, he began to beseech the Theotokos with tears:

“**Queen of Heaven, help me to learn!**”

Suddenly, the Church's iron gates swung open and a regal woman emerged, who took him by the hand and led him to the Icon of our Savior, saying:

“**My Son, help this child, Gabriel, to learn!**”

With these words, she blessed him and gave him her hand to kiss.

“**Now you know how to read and write!**” she told him.

■ Self-Reproach, Contrition, and Mourning

Small Sacrifices For the Sake of Christ* Blessed Christian Mourning

A young man once complained to his Elder that his heart was so hardened that he could not weep even during prayer.

“I sin day and night, yet I cannot weep,” he said. “Every day I go from bad to worse. I want to repent, to weep, but I cannot. I am almost never contrite. Why am I inwardly so stony? What is wrong with me? What am I lacking?”

* * *

To these agonizing questions, the Elder replied: “You are lacking **self-reproach** and **mourning**. Thus, if you eat and sleep more than you need, mourning is dampened, the mind is darkened, and the passions gain strength. If on a daily basis you **judge others, talk too much, and are proud and vainglorious**, then mourning leaves you completely and permanently. That is why you need to

With that, she entered the Altar from the north door. Seeing that she did come back out, he followed her into the Altar, but did not find her there.

When it was time for the Church service, the Sacristan opened the outer door and was startled to see Gabriel inside. Looking at him in surprise, he asked him:

“How did you get in here?”

The young boy described to him in detail all that had taken place. Taking a book, the Sacristan gave it to him, saying:

“Here, read this, and we will see if you are now literate, as She told you.”

Gabriel began to read beautifully and with ease, and the Sacristan exclaimed:

“Indeed, it was the *Panagia* and no ordinary woman!”

(*) Hieromonk Antonios, *Lives of Athonite Monks of the Nineteenth Century* [in Greek], Vol. II (Ormylia: *Hierou Metochiou Evangelismou tes Theotokou*, 1995), pp. 213 and 244.

make **small sacrifices every day for the sake of Christ.**”

“What kind of sacrifices?” asked the young man with some puzzlement.”

“**Look here... very small sacrifices, which sound completely insignificant**, but which help to create and forge in us a Christ-like character.

“For example: • on the table there is fresh bread; leave it and take stale bread for the love of Christ. • Eat leftovers instead of today’s freshly-cooked and tasty food. • If someone brings you fine and choice wine, dilute it with water, or even pour some vinegar in it for the sake of Him Who was given gall and vinegar on the Cross. • From among the fruit on the table, choose the worst for yourself. • Every now and then, use a hard pillow or none at all on your bed, in remembrance of Christ our Savior Who had *nowhere to lay His head*. • If you are cold at night, never complain, since Christ on the Cross was naked and cold for your sake. • Are you hungry and thirsty? Be patient and do not grumble; keep in mind that Christ also hungered and thirsted in the desert for your sake.

“Thus, if in everything you do you blend in a little affliction, a little self-denial, and a little pain, and you do so with all your heart, then be sure that you will acquire contrition and mourning.”

* * *

This great spiritual Father and Elder, with his wisdom and experience, bequeathed to us—not just monastics, but also struggling Christians in the world—a wondrous spiritual legacy as to how to acquire blessed Christian mourning.



(*) Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, *Spiritual Reflections on the Beatitudes* [in Greek] (Piraeus 2009), p. 73.

■ How the unclean spirits acquire “rights” over us

The Chickpeas and the Devil*

The Nightmare



Mrs. X., a married woman in Athens, had problems with her husband, who cheated on her. Some people suggested to her that she visit a “nice lady,” who supposedly could solve her family problems.

The lady in question turned out to be a medium. She

read incantations over X. and gave her nine chickpeas to place in her home... so that her husband would “pull himself together”!

From that time on, however, X. had constant nightmares. She would see a ghastly fiend that threatened to kill her. And so time passed....

Once, passing by the Church of Kapnik-area in Athens, she saw someone selling **Icons of the Panagia Eikosiphoinissas** (a copy of the wonderworking Icon treasured at the Monastery of the same name in Drama, Greece).

She bought one, and prayed to the *Panagia* that her usual nightmare would not reoccur.

That night however, the fiend again appeared in her dream. She began to scream: “*Panagia*, help me and save me!”

A woman then appeared in her doorway, holding a child in her arms.

Terrified, X. screamed: “Go away! You are also a bad person!”

In the meantime, however, when the fiend

caught sight of the woman bearing the baby – none other than the *Panagia* – he immediately vanished.

The *Panagia* entered X's room and said to her:

“I am not a bad person. I am the Panagia. That other one comes here and frightens you because you have the nine chickpeas. Throw them out and he will not come again. When you wake up, you will see my Icon in your Icon corner.”

And indeed, when she awoke, she saw the Icon of the *Panagia* that she had bought in her Icon corner.

She threw out the chickpeas, and the nightmares came to an end.

* * *

● **Question:** What was the matter with the chickpeas? Did the differ in some way from other chickpeas? Were they to blame for the problem?

● **Answer:** No, of course it was not the fault of the chickpeas, but rather that X. had put them in her room in obedience to, and with full trust in, the medium, an instrument of the Devil. **Her acting in compliance with Satan's will gave him certain rights over her.** That is what freed him to terrorize her.

● **All those who have recourse to the occult and its resources (mediums, fortune-tellers, astrologers, and the like), fall into the same frightful sin.**

Thus, they create similar, and even worse, problems for themselves and their families.

They give the Devil certain rights over them, allowing him to act not only freely, but even... *by invitation!*



(*) Protopresbyter Demetrios Athansiou and Presbytera Charoula Tsouliae, *Panton Anasa*, (Athens: Ekdo-seis “Athos,” 2009), pp. 157-158.

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