

The Elder Paisios and Saint Efimia

**Taken from the Bios of the Elder Paisios of
the Holy Mountain**

by Hieromonk Isaac, pages 224-228

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The Elder (Paisios) was in the front yard of his retreat when he was visited by one of his spiritual children. He was repeating, from the heart, "Glory to You, o God", over and over again.

"Can someone be rendered useless - in a good sense?" the Elder suddenly asked him.

"Who would that be, Elder?"

"Well, I was sitting in my Cell quietly, then she came here and drove me crazy... They are having such a good time, 'up there'.."

"What's troubling you, Elder?"

"I will tell you, but don't you tell anyone."

He went on to narrate the following:

"I had just returned from the world, to deal with an ecclesiastic matter." (He had a meeting with the late Mayor of Athens, Mr.Tritsis)

"It was Tuesday, around 10 in the morning, I was in my Cell reciting the Hours. I hear a knock on my door, and a woman's voice saying:

"With the blessings of our holy Fathers..." (OODE note: the traditional monastic manner of requesting permission to enter another's quarters).

I thought to myself: ***"How did a woman come to be on the Holy Mountain?"***

And yet, I could feel a divine sweetness flow through me, so I asked: ***"Who is it?"***

"Efimia" (replied the voice).

I thought to myself: "Who is this Efimia? Could it be a woman who did something foolish and came to the Mountain wearing men's clothes? What am I supposed to do now?"

A second knock was heard.

I asked again: ***"Who is it?"***

"Efimia" (replied the voice again).

I thought it over and decided to not open the door. At the third knock, the door opened on its own, even though it was bolted from the inside. I heard footsteps outside, in the corridor. I dashed out of my Cell and saw a woman who was wearing a head veil. She was accompanied by someone who resembled Luke the Evangelist, but he vanished. Despite my certainty that this was not a sinister phenomenon because the woman's presence glowed with a radiant light, I asked her who she was.

"The martyr Efimia"* (she replied).

"If you are indeed the martyr Efimia, come with me, and let us prostrate ourselves before the Holy Trinity. Whatever I do, you must do."

I went into the chapel, prostrating myself and saying ***"In the name of the Father...."***. She repeated it, also prostrating herself.

"And of the Son...."

"And of the Son...." she repeated in a soft voice.

"Louder, so I can hear you" I said to her, and she repeated it, in a louder voice.

While still in the corridor, her prostrations were not in the direction of the chapel, but towards my Cell. At first I was puzzled, but then I remembered I had a tiny paper icon of the Holy Trinity pasted onto a piece of wood, which

was hanging above the door of my Cell. After our third prostration, saying:

"And of the Holy Spirit..."

I said to her:

"Now, let me prostrate myself before you." I prostrated myself and kissed her feet and then the tip of her nose. I thought it too impertinent to kiss her face.

The Saint sat down on a stool and I sat myself down on the small chest, and she proceeded to give me the solution to my concern (regarding the ecclesiastic matter).

Then she told me about her life. I knew that a Saint Efimia existed, but I didn't know anything about her life. When she described her martyrdoms, I didn't only hear them being described; it was as though I could actually see them and feel them.... I shuddered.... oh my God !!

"How did you survive such tortures?" I asked.

"If I had known what kind of glory the Saints have, I would have done whatever I could to undergo much worse tortures."

"Well, after that occurrence, I was unable to do anything for three whole days. I was beside myself with elation and was constantly praising God. I didn't want to eat, I didn't want anything... I was constantly glorifying...."

In one of his letters the Elder had mentioned:

"In all my life, I will never be able to repay my huge obligation to Saint Efimia, who, although entirely unknown to me, and without being obliged to, bestowed on me such a great honour..."

When describing the incident, he added very humbly that Saint Efimia appeared before him, "not because I was deserving, but only because I was preoccupied at the time with an issue that had to do with the state of the Church in general, and for two other reasons."

What had especially impressed the Elder was "how that petite, frail person could last through such tortures....If she were more of a....(implying a woman of a bigger and stronger physique).... but she was so tiny...."

While in that paradisiacal state, the Elder composed a versicle in honour of

the Saint: *"With what complimentary songs can we praise Efimia, who condescended from above and visited a wretched resident monk in Kapsala? On knocking the third time, the door opened miraculously and she, the Martyr of Christ, entered with heavenly glory, and we worshipped together the Holy Trinity."*

He also composed a closing hymn, which began with the words: *"Glorious Great Martyr of Christ, Efimia, I love you very-very much, after the Most Holy Mother...."*

(Of course he did not intend these compositions for liturgical use, nor did he chant them in public.)

Contrary to his custom, the Elder left (Kapsala) for the town of Souroti and made the sisters of the monastery there participants of that celestial joy. With his help and his instructions, they painted an icon of the Saint exactly as she had appeared before him.

The Elder himself had fashioned a negative of the Saint's icon onto a metal mold, which he used to print small, stamped icons that he distributed as blessings to visitors, in honour of Saint Efimia. While sculpting the mold of the icon, he had trouble fashioning the fingers of her left hand. He said: "I struggled to fashion her hand, but then I put forward a positive thought to explain it : 'Perhaps it is because I had also oppressed the poor girl'..."

*During the Fourth, Holy and Ecumenical Council, which was convened in Chalcedon by the pious emperors Marcian and Pulcheria in the grand basilica of Saint Efimia, the 630 Fathers undertook the retraction of the heretical views of Archmandrite Eutychius, who was supported by Archbishop Dioscorus of Alexandria. To resolve the dispute through a divine decision, the Patriarch -saint Anatolius- proposed to both sides to compose a tome containing their respective Confession of Faith, and both documents would then be placed inside the reliquary of saint Efimia. The two parchments, on which were inscribed the definitions of the Faith with regard to the Person of Christ, were placed on the saint's chest and after the reliquary was sealed shut, the Fathers began to pray. After eight days, they all went to the witnessing place, where, upon opening the reliquary, *they discovered to their amazement that the saint was hugging the Orthodox tome in her arms, as though she wanted to place it inside her heart, whereas the tome of the heretics appeared to have been thrown down to her feet. In the face of such a splendid proof of the truth, the Orthodox offered up thanks to God, and the heretics were scorned and jeered by the crowd of faithful.*



Other miracles have been mentioned, which the precious relics of saint Efimia have performed. During a Persian invasion, the barbarians stormed Chalcedon and attempted to destroy her relics with fire. However, they remained intact and furthermore, blood was seen pouring out of the hole that was made to open the reliquary. This miracle repeated itself occasionally at later times and would heal the faithful who came to collect some of the blood of saint Efimia. However, her tomb would more frequently exude a fragrant aroma, thus witnessing the favour that God had bestowed on the saint.

To protect them from another vandalization, the precious relics were translated to Constantinople where they were deposited in the temple of Saint Efimia, near the Hippodrome. During the years of persecutions by Constantine V Kopronymos, her temple was turned into an arsenal, while her precious relics were thrown into the sea and were washed ashore on a coast of Limnos Island, where they were salvaged by two fishermen. They were rediscovered during the reign of the Empress Irene and were transferred officially to the Capital (Constantinople) in 796, where they continued to work miracles. After many other adventures, the relics are now venerated in the temple of the Ecumenical Patriarchate in Fanarion. [The New Book of Saints of the Orthodox Church (July Volume), "Indictus" Publications, p. 112]

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