



[Previous](#) // [Contents](#) // [Next](#)

ELDER PORPHYRIOS Testimonies and Experiences

Conversations with Greek and Cypriot friends

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K.I.: The gifts that the Holy Spirit gave to Elder Porphyrios and through him to contemporary Hellenism and Orthodoxy worldwide were limitless. And you Fr. Ioannikios, a monk of Mt.Athos, are included amongst those who had the blessing to get to know Elder Porphyrios.

Fr.I.: Elder Porphyrios was a contemporary starets of Greek Orthodoxy. He was a charismatic figure. He had received the gifts of the Holy Spirit very early on in his life.

As he himself told me the two factors that helped him very much in his life and that gave him spiritual grace, were firstly, to use his words, "the cheerful obedience which I gave to my Elders."

K.I.: That's a wonderful characterization of obedience, "cheerful obedience."

Fr.I.: Yes, that's what he himself told me and he went on to explain, "For example, they said to me, 'Nikita' (for that was my name as a monk at Kavsokalyvia, Mt.Athos) 'run down to the pier and fetch that sack of flour. And even before my Elder had finished giving me the order I had already started to run towards the pier, to load up the sack, and, with cheerful obedience, to return.' This cheerful obedience of his was the first factor. The other factor was his unceasing noetic prayer, "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me." He practiced the noetic prayer constantly and unceasingly.

He left the Holy Mountain because of illness with the blessing of his Elders, and he followed the well-known course, until in the end, for peace and quiet, he went to Milesi, Malakasa, where he built his well-known convent. Once when I visited him there he said to me, Tm amazed and astonished at why all these people come to me. I don't believe that I say anything outstanding. I just tell them whatever God enlightens me to say at that moment.

These words alone are enough to prove what great humility Elder Porphyrios had. He didn't have the feeling that he was anything outstanding. That's why he wrote in his final letter, "The world, however, received me well, and everyone shouts that I'm a saint. I, however, feel that I am the most sinful person in the world."

The element of humility is, as you know, the true criterion of a really holy man.

K.I.: With regard to his gifts of discernment and foresight, which experience would you like to tell us about, Fr. Ioannikios?

Fr.L: I'll tell you one of those ones which I remember.

I hadn't seen him for years. I had gone to Macedonia, *where God made me worthy, the poor and needy person that I am, to lay the foundations of the Holy Convent " of St. Gregory Palamas which was built afterwards.

K.I.: At Koufalia, Thessaloniki, where you are spiritual father to the brotherhood of St. Gregory Palamas.

Fr.L: Exactly.

I went to receive his blessing, to find for my troubled mind a little peace, consolation and hope, which Elder Porphyrios always gave to those who visited him. Primarily he had the great gift of love which he manifested by consoling all those people. Elder Porphyrios was, we could say, a comforter.

K.I.: That's very good, what you said, "a comforter."

Fr.L: When I had received his blessing and we talked a little, suddenly he looked up at me and said, smiling, "Tell me, outside the monastery you're building, what have you put out front there, before we enter the monastery?"

"What have I put there, Elder?" I asked.

"I see....I see...." he replied.

"What do you see, Elder?"

"I see a large cross."

We really had placed a large wooden cross in that spot. I was astonished by the grace he had. I took his hand and kissed it with respect, but also with joy, because I found myself next to a grace-filled Elder and because even in our times the Church gives birth to people with such grace and so many gifts of the Holy Spirit.

He had the gift of being able to see far away, for distances of kilometers, places that he had never been to and had never read about. He could see geographic length, width and depth, where he even discovered the existence or non-existence of underground water beds. At the same time he had the gift of Holy Spirit to penetrate and reveal, with wonderful ease, the depths of people's souls, and to discover their hidden secrets. For us this was something supernatural, for him it was natural, like he was seeing things with his physical eyes. Fr. Porphyrios was an eye of the spirit.

K.I.: Which beneficial words of Elder Porphyrios do you most remember?

Fr.I.: He said that we should love Christ as much as we could. "Whoever loves Christ," he said, "avoids sin." He stressed the importance of love for God very much.

And rightly so, because, as you know, someone can live carefully and with virtue in order to avoid hell. That is the first category of people. In the second category are the people who try not to sin in order to get their reward from God, to enter Paradise. The third and highest category, as Elder Porphyrios taught, is this: for a person to live with virtue, because he loves God, because he doesn't want to grieve the Lord, Who "first loved us." This love creates a heavenly state within the soul and is the beginning of paradise. Elder Porphyrios also stressed that, he had been greatly helped by study and diligence, that stillness - according to the expression, "Be still and know that I am the Lord God." - generally found in the hymnography of our Church. He very much loved the hymns of our Church. He also liked to read, recite and sing them.

The hymns, the spiritual treasure of Orthodoxy, give a commentary, in the best possible way, of the Holy Scriptures, our Orthodox Tradition, the Patristic texts, the doctrines of the Church and the whole of Theology.

I believe that Elder Porphyrios had within himself and expressed a mystical theology which is predominantly found in St. Maximos the Confessor and in St. Isaac the Syrian.

K.I.: Could you tell us something else, Fr. Ioannikios, something related to the stance of Elder Porphyrios towards some particular problem, out of all the problems that torment people?

Fr.I.: I will tell you one particular story, which shows the grandeur of Elder Porphyrios' soul.

Many, many years ago, on the eve of Theophany, * he went according to custom to bless houses with holy water. As he was entering the houses, one after the other, he entered, without realizing it, a house of ill-repute. At the moment when he began to chant "O Lord, save Thy people ..." and to bless, the manageress said to him, "Don't, don't, it's not right for them to kiss the cross." Then, Elder Porphyrios replied, "I don't know whether it's not right for them or for you to kiss the cross."

Those women kissed the cross and Elder Porphyrios spoke with them a little. He told them about love towards God, that was his favorite subject.

Seeing the saintly figure of Elder Porphyrios, these women changed inside. Especially when he told them, "Love Christ Who loves you and you'll see how happy you'll be. If only you knew how much Christ loves you. Make an effort to love Him, too."

Elder Porphyrios knew that if those women got to know Christ and to love Him, because knowing leads to loving, then they would abandon the miserable profession that they practiced.

The following addition was sent to us by Fr. Ioannikios Kotsonis, for the second edition. We thank him.

I remember that whenever the holy Elder spoke about the Skete of Kavsokalyvia on the Holy Mountain, he typically felt a sense of joy, a sense of comfort and of spiritual pleasure. It was a subject which he held dear. The tranquil location, the struggling fathers of his day, the huts, the caves of the saints, the main Church, the Divine Services, asceticism, nature, nostalgic memories of his adolescence (he entered the Monastic Commonwealth at a very young age). All this and much, much more, both indescribable and inexpressible of the hidden life in Christ and of his mystical ascent, had created for the Elder a Paradise before Paradise. And justly so, since it was from thence that his holiness sprung forth, from thence his asceticism and obedience, from thence his holy humility (as they said), from thence noetic prayer and uncreated energy, from thence his discernment and gifts, from thence the basis of his future direction.

He told me many times about a supernatural event that amazes, which happened when he was at Kavsokalyvia, a short time before he left the Holy Mountain for good. One time Fr. Ioannikios, the old man and spiritual brother of Fr. Porphyrios, sent him to collect snails. This lenten food of the ascetics is usually found on craggy rocks and in ravines. Elder Porphyrios, then only a young monk, filled his haversack with snails in order to please his elder. In doing this he clambered up a dangerously inaccessible rocky slope. On his way back he passed through a gorge filled with stones, which started to roll down and to sweep him away.

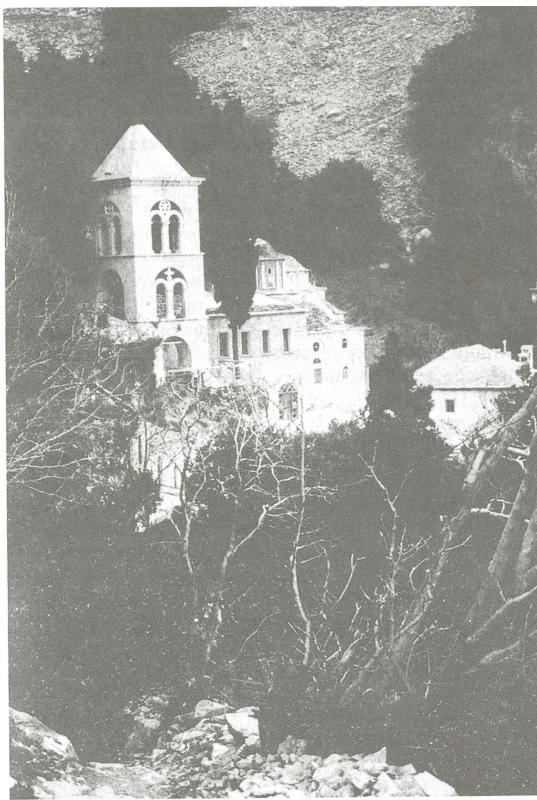
He cried out, "My sweet Panaghia!" and he told us, "Without realizing what was happening at that moment, in the wink of an eye, a power took hold of me and transported me on to a rock at the other side of the ravine. From here, when I had recovered, I took the path with led back to the Skete."

He caught a cold from this incident and became seriously ill. Then with the blessing of his elders he went to his village and then to Athens.

When Fr. Porphyrios speaks to us about Man, about God, about the world, about love, about prayer, about the whole of Creation, he spoke with theological criteria (being a graduate of the second grade of Elementary School!). He really had the gift of Theology that flows from the Living Spring of the Holy Spirit. And, indeed, of mystical Theology, which blossoms from philosophy according to Christ. He was a mystical theologian without worldly education. He only had the education of asceticism, of quietness, and of noetic effort. He said, "May we all enter the earthly uncreated Church, because if we don't enter it, then we will not enter heaven." "We can unite, if we live a mystical life..." "Divine grace comes richly, but gently like a 'murmur', as the Old Testament says. "Become saints..."

I once spoke to the Elder about certain difficulties, anomalies and disharmony that had appeared in the relations between the nuns, caused by the passion of jealousy. The Elder told me that this passion was one of the greatest; in women it is so strong that it is only uprooted with great difficulty. Love must prevail, so that great evil, jealousy, will flee.

All these and many other stories (that I don't remember, as we didn't have the foresight to write them down) demonstrate the mystical life and the mystical vision so keenly disposed of by that holy abba.



The main Church of the Holy Skete of Kavokalyvia, in which the revered body of Elder Porphyrios was placed after his death until his burial.

[Previous](#) // [Contents](#) // [Next](#)

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[Up](#)