



## **Life of Elder Ieronymos**

### **A Brief Life of Righteous Elder Ieronymos of Aegina (+1966)**

Born Vasilios Apostolides, Fr. Ieronymos was born in 1883 in the village Galyveri of Cappadocia in Asia Minor. His pious parents, Anastasios and Elizabeth, had six children. As a boy he was deeply impressed by the fervent prayers of both his mother and the secret ascetics who lived in the cave-churches of Turkish-occupied Cappadocia. As a young man he was ordained deacon by Metropolitan Sophronios of Amisos in Asia Minor. Later, he visited the Holy Land and stayed for nine months in the Monastery of St. John the Forerunner near the River Jordan. On his return, he served as a deacon in the Church of St. George in Constantinople, where he was long remembered for his holiness, his zeal, and his wonderful voice. The Exchange of Populations in 1922 brought Fr. Ieronymos, as well as millions of his fellow Greeks, back to Greece as refugees, ending the two thousand-year-old Greek Christian civilization in Asia Minor.

Thus, just two years after the repose of St. Nectarios, the island of Aegina gave refuge to another righteous one. When Deacon Vasilios arrived on Aegina, he became acquainted with a priest who was eventually consecrated Metropolitan Panteleimon of Karistia (Evia). Metropolitan Panteleimon convinced Vasilios that he should accept the priesthood, and a year after his ordination he was tonsured a monk, with the name Ieronymos (Jerome) after Elder Ieronymos of Simonopetra on the Holy Mountain. Soon after the ordination, however, Fr. Ieronymos had a terrifying vision of the Lord Himself as a baby lying on the holy altar. He was so shaken and convinced of his unworthiness to serve Holy Liturgy that he retired from active ministry and went to live in a small monastery-sketete named Evangelismos (the Annunciation), on the outskirts of town. He lived in one small room, which he also used as a workshop. For his private prayers he would enclose himself in a tiny, circular, white-washed room, bare of decoration, which reminded him of the many small rock churches in his native Cappadocia. He was

assisted by a nun, Sister Eupraxia, who reposed in 1990.

Local people often came to Fr. Ieronymos for advice, and his prayers were believed to be a healing balm. One old villager whom the author talked to, could only repeat, "He was so kind. When I went to him for confession or advice, he was so very kind..." Another said, "Even when you laid eyes on him, you felt that his blessing and God's grace filled you so completely that you walked away like a new person." His clairvoyance was pronounced, and visitors were often awestruck by how deeply he knew their affairs and souls. But he was always gentle. A novice who now helps look after the monastery relates that, when people came to him, the elder always offered them *loukoumi* (a Greek fruit candy covered with powdered sugar). If they refused he would smile and say, "Don't be disobedient."

He spoke frequently about the coming of Antichrist, and also warned that the planned change to the civil calendar would open the door to other untraditional changes in the Church. After the civil calendar was installed, he didn't join one of the old calendar groups, but stayed with the main body of the Greek Church although he always quietly celebrated the old Julian calendar dates.

He was also a healer and so great was his interest in medicine that he assisted in establishing the Aegina hospital. To those who were suffering from physical ailments, he often gave out a herbal medicine which he had learned to make on Mount Athos. His spiritual children, however, were never sure if the benefit was from the medicine itself, or if the herbs were only a cover for his unceasing prayer. One old woman told the author that in the 1960's she had a very severe, protracted, skin disease. She visited many doctors in Athens but found no relief. Fr. Ieronymos gave her the herbal salve to cover her shoulders and back, and within a few days she was completely healed.

Once, as he passed by a small workshop where craftsmen were laboring, he felt in his soul that something was wrong and strongly urged them to go home early. The workers ignored the priest's advice and continued working until late that afternoon, when there was an explosion and several suffered severe injuries. Everyone survived however, and the workers themselves attributed this to the prayers of Fr. Ieronymos.

Another story, from a retired employee of the old bakery, relates that Fr. Ieronymos one day ordered some flour so that he could make bread. He requested that it be milled by a certain time and left the shop. A few hours later the lazy worker who was to prepare his flour began swearing about the job, blaspheming the names of the Lord and the Mother of God. Suddenly the bakery employees saw Fr. Ieronymos running towards the shop. Going straight up to the worker who was responsible for his order, he said, "Excuse me, excuse me. If I've upset you just forget the whole thing, don't do the work." From two kilometers away he had heard some cursing on account of him. The workers were astonished and they all repented and begged his forgiveness.

When the elder was about sixty years old he lost his right arm. German soldiers who were stationed on Aegina during the W.W. II occupation of Greece knew that Fr. Ieronymos was interested in mechanical things - particularly clocks and watches - and that he often opened them to see how they ran. One day a soldier maliciously gave him a live grenade. Fr. Ieronymos did not know what it was, and when he pulled out the pin it exploded and blew off his arm.

At least once, and perhaps twice after his incident, while he was praying in his small

crypt-chapel, two of his spiritual children came quietly to the door to see if he was free to talk. Opening the door, they saw him praying, seemingly in an ecstasy with *both* arms raised in prayer, the missing one as strong and vital as a young man's. Fr. Ieronymos quickly came to himself, and said, "Well, don't think this is anything. In heaven there are many greater miracles than this. Don't speak about it."

After suffering for two months from a painful disease he died in an Athens hospital on October 2, 1966 (OS). Although not yet canonized, his relics repose in his Skete of the Annu

- Mother Nectaria (McLees), *Evlogeite! A Pilgrim's Guide to Greece*, pp.72-76.