

On the Wondrous Interventions of the Mighty Right Hand of Divine Providence

For St. Dionysios of Olympus, God was his total enjoyment, spiritual pleasure, and care during his ascetic struggles in Panagia's garden. Taking no care for his bodily sustenance, he fed only on wild chestnuts. But the all-merciful and all-caring God, to show His endless care and protection toward those who are His friends and servants, allowed the following to happen on a Saturday before the Great Lent.

A monk from the monastery of Zographou came to him and said, "Holy Father, the Great Lent is here. Take this food to comfort your weak body a little bit, and give thanks to God, Who provides abundantly and satisfies the entire world with His love." After he said this, he vanished, in spite of the saint's pleading for him to stay and share the food with him.

The saint was amazed that the fish brought by the unknown monk was still alive, and the cheese was so fresh that whey was dripping from it, and he praised the all-providing God.

The person who originally built the monastery of Docheiariou was St. Euthymios, a friend of our holy father Athanasios of Athos. He had built a church honouring St. Nicholas, and had shed a lot of sweat struggling in the ascetic arena.

The second builder of the monastery was the holy Neophytos, St. Euthymios' nephew. He was the son of a duke at the court of Emperor Nikiphoros Phokas, and he had himself been First Secretary to Emperor John Tsimiskis. His forsaking of this world's honour and glory was admirable,

The holy, grace-filled Theophanis the Docheiaritan proved also to be a miracle-worker. He changed seawater from salty to fresh and the rough seas to calm. He built a monastery near Veria dedicated to the angels, and after his repose he worked many miracles.

Our glorious, blessed Mother and Protector of all, the Lady Theotokos, has continually proven her guardianship and motherly care for her beloved children, the Athonite monks. There are countless proofs of her favours. Once during pirate attacks against the monasteries, the pious hegumen of Vatopedi heard the Holy Theotokos' voice coming from her icon. She told him not to open the gate but to sound the alarm and tell the monks to climb up the fortress walls to repel the enemy.

In the same monastery lived a blessed hierodeacon vimataris' who hid the icon of the Theotokos, called "Vimatarissa," in the monastery's well. It was found, many years after the monk's capture by barbarians, standing upright on the water with a lighted candle beside it.

Genadios, the docharis of Vatopedi, lived a holy life according to God's will and was blessed to witness a miracle worked by the Holy Theotokos. He saw a previously empty urn fill up with so much oil that it ran over and underneath the door of the storage room.

It has been said that in Iviron's skete there was a monk who was blind from birth, and whose name was Anthimos. Hearing about the miracles of the Lady Theotokos, the Portaitissa, which she had worked throughout the world, he prayed to her to cure him of his blindness, and he revered the Portaitissa icon so much that he asked an iconographer to paint one for him. In response, the iconographer started preparing to paint the icon. But every time he tried to start the sketch for it, his hand would freeze.

A few days later Father Anthimos, thinking that the icon must be ready, went to get it from the iconographer, who told him that each time he would start to draw, his hands would become numb so that he could not work. When Father Anthimos heard this, he knelt down and, pleading with tears in his eyes, begged the Theotokos to allow the painter to make her holy icon, the Portaitissa, the Holy Mountain's protector.

The all-holy one did not ignore his desire. The icon was finished on a wooden plank without the work of a painter, and then she opened Father Anthimos' eyes so that he might see her all-pure face and that of our Lord Jesus Christ. This event became known throughout the entire world. Father Anthimos saw her with opened eyes, enjoying his vision of her immensely; then his eyes were dimmed again, and he became as before.

In the desert of Kerasia lived two elderly ascetics, Ioannis and Theodosios. They were assigned the obedience of carving wooden spoons. They had made so many that they filled two sacks with them, until under Panagia's providence a merchant from Romania came and bought them all.

On St. George's feast day, the hut of St. George on Karoulia was celebrating its patronal day. The year was somewhere within 1930 to 1935. Approximately twenty to twenty-five I Russian and Greek ascetics were gathered there for the vigil,; but they had no fish for the feast.

Father Zosimas, a most charismatic and simple monk who "• loved his fellow men and was the most charitable of all the \ Russian Athonite ascetics, proposed that they fish from; where they were, since the hut was situated on the edge of a] cliff above the endless abyss of the sea,

"Yes, but how can we fish without a hook or bait?" they others replied.

"Here is a nail, some string, and a piece of bread," said I the elder. They crossed themselves, cast the unusual fishing! rod and, miraculously, caught a large fish with which to make soup. It was a gift donated by the hut's patron saint!

"What are you doing?" he asked. "Is this all the wheat you have? No more?"

The fathers replied that this was all they had indeed, and: that they were unable to buy any more because of the Occupation. It should be noted that 10,000 okas' weight of J wheat were needed a year for the monastery's survival, and they could not buy even one oka of it.

The unknown priest took a few wheat kernels in his hand, 1 blessed them and threw them on top of the rest of the wheat. I He blessed the four points of the horizon, the monastery, and the sea, and then was about to leave.

"Where do you come from?" the fathers asked him. "Stay J to have some bread and olives!"

"I come from very far away—from Lycia's Myra," he said and departed.

One of the brothers had in the meantime gone for some food to offer their visitor, but the elder who was the monastery's actual protector had vanished. The remaining 150 okas of blessed wheat lasted to the end of the year, that is, from the month of December when St. Nicholas appeared to them, until the following July when the new crop came.

The following marvellous incident occurred thirty years ago in St. Paul's monastery. It confirms Panagia's true presence in all phases and needs of our life. In the monastery there lived a simple old elder with a pure heart, the monk Thomas.

His obedience was to assist in the bakery. Being graced with simplicity and goodness, he was also blessed with marvellous visions.

One day when it happened that the two monks who were in charge of the bakery were absent, the entire responsibility fell upon their helper, Elder Thomas. He had to prepare and bake enough bread for a two-day supply, a huge amount intended for all the fathers and visiting pilgrims.

He did not know what to do. He had no idea where to begin and how. So with tears in his eyes he prayed to Panagia to help him. Then he took some yeast and started adding water and flour. At that moment a glorious lady dressed in black appeared to him. She mixed the ingredients, shaped the loaves, and baked them. Elder Thomas during all this time of preparation felt as if he were not even there.

Shortly after, when he told the fathers what had happened, they realized that this woman was the Theotokos. The bread, in fact, turned out to be very sweet and tasted exceedingly good. "Elder Thomas, you must have put some thing in the bread to make it bake so fast and taste so good!" they would tell him.

This same care the all-holy Theotokos, our Mother, demonstrated in various ways during the German occupation.

A long while after St. Athanasios of Athos had started constructing the Great Lavra, he faced a great economic difficulty: he had neither the money to pay the craftsmen's 1 wages, nor did he have any food. So he started out for Karyes the Holy Mountain's capital, to find out what he ought to do.

After he had walked for two hours, suddenly there appeared before him a glorious lady, who asked him,

"Abba Athanasios, where are you going? Why have you abandoned the

project which you have started, a project which pleases God? Go back and finish it!" Astonished, he looked at her with awe and asked, "Who are you? My lady, how do you know me, and how do you order me to return? With what can I continue the monastery's construction, since no means are left for it?" Then she told him that she was the Mother of God. She ordered him to return, and she promised that she would take care of the money and the food supplies. The saint asked her to give him a sign in confirmation of this.

"Here, hit with your staff this rock," she told him, and immediately fresh water sprang from the rock — which to this day is still flowing.

Saint Athanasios returned to his monastery where he found money, and his storage bins were full of food, even as the Theotokos had promised. With renewed desire and zeal he continued, and soon the monastery was completed, and he gave thanks and glory many times to her blessed name.

The holy Portaitissa icon is known as the greatest miracle-worker on the Holy Mountain.

When the fiery rod was seen reaching from heaven to the sea, it pointed to the place where the icon was found, and the revelation of it was made to an Iviritan hermit, the holy Gabriel, who came down from the mountain and walked on the sea as if it were dry land. He took up the large icon and the monks placed it with great honour in the sanctuary. But Panagia told the hegumen, "I came here to protect you, not to be protected by you." So the monks repeatedly found her by the monastery's gate after they had placed the icon back in the sanctuary. Since that time the icon has been called "Portaitissa," meaning "of the gate." It is full of grandeur, magnificent in appearance, a depiction worthy of the Mother of God — she who is our awesome protectress, our helper, and our salvation.

On the most revered face of Portaitissa there is a scar, the result of its being struck by the sword of a pirate who, when he delivered the blow, saw blood flow from the wound. This miracle affected him so profoundly that he was baptized, tonsured a monk, and remained in the monastery. Although he did not want to be called anything but "Barbarian," he nonetheless lived such a godly life of repentance and asceticism that he was sanctified. There is a frescoed icon of him in the little chapel of Portaitissa. He is dressed as a pirate and has the title of "Saint Barberos."

When our holy father Akakios the Kafsokalyvitan was struggling ascetically in a cave in the unbearably lonely his biographer hieromonk Ionas from Kafsokalyvia, an eyewitness to his life, says that every morning a beautiful bird would come and sit on a tree outside the cave warbling an exquisite melody. As the holy one listened to the bird, he would be filled with an ineffable pleasure' freed him from the boredom and sadness which sometimes attacks hesychasts. Perhaps that bird was an angel in

Lord sent to console him in that inconsolable desert

This St. Akakios was blessed with the gift of peacemaking. As soon as anyone tormented by inner thoughts would look upon the holy one's joyful face, he would! peaceful and free of anxiety.

Holy Gregorios, who laboured ascetically near the Lavra during the 13th century, was the spiritual fathers of Gregory Palamas, the great teacher of our Orthodox faith.

That blessed elder of St. Gregory Palamas had so much practised the virtue of possessionlessness and carefree, unceasing prayer, that he was blessed to receive nourishment from an angel of God.

Many years have passed since the marvellous miracle which occurred on the feast day of St. Nicholas in the holy monastery of Gregoriou. The well-known monk Hadjigiorgis the fasting One was at that time the novice Gabriel. The fathers were sad because due to bad weather, they had not been able to fish for food to be offered for the festal dinner. But Gabriel did not despair. His trust and hope was St. Nicholas. He immersed himself in total prayer and supplication. Shortly thereafter, on the eve of the feast, strong waves washed many big, beautiful fish onto the monastery's shore. As soon as the fathers saw them, they ran to gather them up in preparation for dinner, glorifying and singing he praises both of Him Who supplies food and of their protector, St. Nicholas.

The famous spiritual father Ioannis, from the cell of Axion Esti, once told of a new worker who had come to the skete of St. Andrew to make his confession. That worker told him that he had died when he was still a young child. Before he was buried, his mother went to the church and prayed on her knees for a long time, shedding many tears. Then she returned home, put on her good clothes, and lay down near her son who was in his coffin and said to him: "Rise, my child; I will go instead of you." The child was resurrected and the mother died that very moment. Years later that child came to the mountain to be a workman in Karyes.

At one time the ever memorable monk Aglaios from Konstamonitou became very ill and was sent by his hegumen to St. Anthony's Kathisma which had a vineyard. The doctor suggested that monk Aglaios eat meat, since he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and was frequently spitting up blood.

The sick elder was very sad, for he was unable to serve his monastery as sexton. He prayed continually, begging the Lord fervently to grant him his health. One day while he was praying thus, he suddenly saw a large deer which came before him, bowed its head, and then fell down writhing. Father Aglaios, afraid that it might die, ran quickly to tell the other fathers and the gardener, who was not a monastic. When the gardener saw the poor animal in that state, he slaughtered and cleaned it. The fathers ruled that Father Aglaios should cook a little of the meat each day. They believed that it had been sent as a gift, a blessing, and a medicine for the sick person by our Lord and God who cures our souls and our bodies.

"But seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matthew 6:33). This commandment of the Lord, which conveys a complete and total trust in Divine Providence, is the ascetic's slogan and living practice.

Elder Cherubim from St. Basil was a carefree ascetic, filled with faith and hope. He was also a little hard of hearing, and one time he was isolated by snow in his impoverished hermitage for over a week without food. One day a stranger with a loaded mule knocked at his door. It was almost night. He asked whether he had time to reach St. Peter's Cave before dark and then to return to St. Paul's Monastery.

Ascetic Cherubim said to him, "My brother, there is so much snow that you won't be able to get to St. Peter's Hermitage even if you had ahead of you a whole day. Stay here tonight and you can go early tomorrow morning."

The stranger replied, "Geronda, I have brought some food supplies which I would like to sell and then return to my work tonight. If you like, keep them and give me a little money."

"Since you are in a hurry, leave them here in this corner and I will give you the money which was given to me by a pilgrim." He went to his room while the stranger was unloading the goods, but when he returned he was not there. He had disappeared. Father Cherubim looked outside and called, but there were neither footprints nor animal tracks in the snow. Then he realized that it had all been the visible energies of the invisible Divine Providence, which looks after everything. He entered his little chapel and thanked the Lord. With gratitude he placed food supplies in his small storage space. They lasted him the whole winter.

To me the unworthy it was given to hear of such wonders as the following, about which the previous hegumen of St. Paul's Monastery, Archimandrite Andreas, told a similar story. The poor hermit Ephrem who lived in a humble hut between the deserts of Katounakia and St. Basil. His hut was a cave, covered with a few tin sheets and situated underneath a huge rock. He lived there with untold hardships and deprivation.

One winter it snowed a lot, and poor elder Ephrem had been completely snowed in. His supply of dried bread was exhausted and he was without food and very hungry for several days. One day in front of his cave's door he saw a layman standing with a huge sack on his back.

"Father, with your blessings, I want to go to Kerasia, but since there is so much snow and soon it will be dark, it would be a blessing to leave my sack here and get it tomorrow in the daytime."

Hermit Ephrem, full of surprise, asked the stranger, "Did you get here, my brother? As you see, there is no path, But come in. There is fire here for you to warm yourself. Leave your load here and come back to get it any time you wish."

Nonetheless the stranger pretended that he was in a hurry to return to St. Paul's and disappeared right before the hermit's eyes. Coming to himself that very instant, Father Ephrem saw nothing else before him but the sack.

He looked: right and left outside the cave, but he saw no tracks in the snow. He opened up the sack and found in it dry bread and other foods which lasted him until the heavy weather of winter was over. His eyes filled with tears of joy and thanks giving for this real act of Divine Providence, and he glorified God and His wonders.

On the ninth of July of every year the monks who are under obedience to Elder Gerasimos the Hymnographer and to his second-in-command, Hieromonk Dionysios, celebrate splendidly with a vigil the feast day of the holy fathers-

Dionysios the Orator and Mitrophanis. They do this in their cave which has been transformed into a beautiful church. In 1958 a glorious feast was celebrated in honour of these saints, one which proved to be even more splendid than

usual because of the miraculous multiplication of the fish which were served to the celebrants at trapeza.

While it was estimated that the amount of fish they had would serve from thirty to forty people, over one hundred arrived for the meal. The cook, Father Damaskinos, became anxious and started praying "Lord have mercy and help me at this hour." He started passing the portions to those who were serving the trapeza, but the pan never grew empty. Forty fifty eighty one hundred portions. Everybody ate for lunch and dinner, and there were even fish left over for the next day!

The ever memorable monk Meletios the Kariotan at one time experienced the protection and help of Panagia, whose icon Axion Esti he tended for many years in Protaton's holy church. He was going from Mount Athos to Thasos by boat with two Thasiotans. While they were sailing, the seas became very rough, and he fell overboard. The other two tried to help him climb back into the boat, but it was impossible. They yelled out to him, "Geronda, you see yourself that we cannot do anything." Indeed as soon as they would try to catch him, the boat would capsize. And in vain he himself kept struggling to get into the boat. At length, exhausted, he cried out from the depths of his heart,

"Panagia, for many years I, your sinful servant, have served you. Hear me this moment, for you see that I am perishing"

Instantly he found himself in the boat again. The sea slowly calmed down, and they all reached their destination safely.

Elder Eustratios had no beard, despite the fact that he was thirty years old. After his elder's death in the Holy Trinity Kathisma of St. Paul's, a place of many caves, he went to Kafsokalyvia. There the elder refused to keep him because the fathers did not want anyone without a beard. Eustratios pleaded insistently. That night they had a vigil in honour of Panagia. In the morning, miraculously, some hair appeared on Eustratios' face, for which he gave praise and thanks giving to her. The most astonishing thing, however, was that as] time went by, his beard grew so much that it reached the ground.

In 1864, Chousni Pasha, the governor of Thessaloniki visited Mount Athos. Educated man that he was, he wanted to visit the Protaton. There he saw, among others, the murals of Saints Onouphrios and Peter the Athonite. But he did not believe that their beards were as long as depicted in the murals, which portrayed them as reaching the ground. The fathers assured him that such a thing is possible, and to prove it they brought in the long-bearded elder Eustratios. The pasha, marvelling, said in Turkish "afentersin efentiler" —meaning "I beg your pardon, gentlemen!"

In the year 1750 on the Sunday before Great Lent began! the monk Makarios of St. Anne's grew very ill. He was about to die. His monk in obedience, Father Theoktistos, was, exceptionally devoted subordinate who that year had be

come also the assistant to the dikaios, the monk in charge of the skete's main church and of the reception of guests. After the liturgy Father Theoktistos was very distressed because he needed to find some fish with which to ma

soup for his elder's nourishment. He went to the skete' dock, but he did not find any boat there or any fishermen

Everything was deserted. The sea was rough. Immediately .he began to pray, falling to his knees right there and plead ing with St. Anne, the mother of the Theotokos and they protectress of the skete.

He had hardly finished his prayer when he saw a huge fish playfully flipping about on the waves. He made the sign of the cross in its direction and, wonder of wonders, the fish was thrown on the sand by the next wave. Over-flowing with gratitude and rejoicing, he immediately took it up and ran to the main skete where his elder lay bedridden. He cooked it, fed the elder, who recovered immediately, and with what was left over fed all the monks and pilgrims who happened to be at the skete that day. They said they had never tasted better fish in their lives than this which had been sent by God.

For three years in a row, light appeared every Friday in the t of the Resurrection of the Lord which belongs to Small

I Anne's and in which the spiritual father Savvas lived.

The ascetics attributed this happening to the fact that Father Savvas had brought the skull of his ever memorable elder, Ilarion the Iviritan, to the hut with him. Elder Ilarion had always honoured each Friday with a total fast.

There was a poor monk in New Skete, Elder Dorotheos, who had never left Mount Athos from the time he was a young child. He made no crafts to sell. He was only able to fish with a small boat. At one time when all his oil was used up, the all-merciful Lord caused a barrel of oil for him to float in from the sea, between New Skete and the docks of St. Paul.

On the day of Pascha in 1935 the hegumen of St. Paul's, Archimandrite Seraphim, and all sixty fathers of the cenobion came out into the courtyard to celebrate the liturgy of the Resurrection. In a joyful mood and full of en-

thusiasm after the "Christ is risen!" was proclaimed, the hegumen said to one of the simple fathers, "Elder Thomas, go where the relics of the fathers are kept and tell them that Christ is risen."

"Let it be blessed, Geronda," he replied, and without a second thought quickly went to the crypt where the bones were kept.

"Fathers, I was sent by the hegumen to say to you 'Christ is risen!'" he cried out in a loud voice.

Then something awesome happened. The bones creaked and jumped. One skull rose up a metre high and answered Father Thomas' proclamation:

"Indeed He is risen!"

There was dead silence after that. The elder rushed back to tell all that he had seen and heard. For the fathers of the monastery that was truly a unique Pascha, and praising the risen Lord and Master of life, they chanted with joy:

Angels are praising your Resurrection in heaven, O Lord! Make us who live on earth to praise you with cleansed hearts!

The ever memorable elder Theodosios, the monastery's late librarian, would often tell the story of this event.

He was always called "Abba," and indeed he was truly a "papa," the elder Isaak the Dionysiatan. In his monastic endeavours of fasting, praying, and struggling humbly, he was loving to everybody, obedient in all things and to everyone. And everybody loved him.

Once while he was on an obedience in the monastery's metochion in Karyes, his supervisor Father Gelasios, who at that time was their monastery's representative in Karyes, warned him that it was already midday and that since a storm was expected, he was in danger of getting lost on the way back at this hour in winter time. But he replied that it was necessary for him, without any excuses, to return to Dionysiou, which was a five hours' walk from Karyes. So, after prostrating himself, the blessed one departed. When he reached the peak of the mountain at Iviron, a heavy snowfall descended. It was very difficult for him to walk. When he reached the hill called "Bosdoum" at Simonopetra, across from Athos, the snow was knee high, and it had already begun to grow dark. He was threatened by darkness, by snow, and by the wild beasts of the forest.

Turning all his hope toward the Lord and Saviour, the blessed elder said from the depths of his heart, "Lord Jesus Christ my God, through the blessings of my holy elder, please save me at this hour." And immediately he was lifted by divine and invisible power and carried to the gate of his own monastery.

It was time for Compline and the doorkeeper was about to close the gate. When he saw Abba Isaak he was surprised and after greeting him reverently asked how he had been able to come in such a storm. The blessed one, being in ecstasy, said that he had come from Karyes.

"But how did you actually get here in this weather?" The abba could not answer, but only looked at the icon of St. John the Forerunner.

The doorkeeper also noticed that there were no footprint in the snow from the direction of Karyes. Finally because' the doorkeeper's insistent questions

about when he left (Is

Athonite capital and how he had arrived at Dionysiou, Abba Isaak was able to tell him and the other fathers what had occurred : he said that he could remember everything which happened to him for the first half of the journey, but that that, he could remember only asking for God's help his elder's prayers. Then he found himself in front of monastery's entrance.

Lazaros of Dionysiou, a most compunction ate elder, told us many stories. Among them was the following: "From 1943 to 1945 suffered terrible dizzy spells, especially during the morning hours. No medicine would cure me of them. Then during the vigil of Sts. Kosmas and Damion, the 'mercenaries, on November 1 , 1945, I went to the chapel ; miring the saints and pleaded with them with all my ii to cure me from this torment. The dizziness went away never came back." This same elder mentioned another instance as well:

After I was cured from malaria, I was left with arthritis i my left leg. I suffered severe pain, burning, and varicose veins. In 1954, again on the feast day of the Unmercenaries Kosmas and Damian, I was in a terrible state and begged the saints for a cure. The vigil was almost over and the pains trained. During the Divine Liturgy, however, the burning sensation ceased, the pains stopped, and the veins came sack to normal. I give thanks and praise to our protectors and healers!

Elder Lazaros composed the following hymn which he wold sing in front of these two saints' icon while he was lighting their oil lamp: From the depth of the heart of a poor worshipper,
With gratitude I thank you,
O Unmercenaries Kosmas and Damianos,
For the cure which you have granted me.



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