



I Saw the Holy Light

Fr. Savvas Achileos

MONK MITROPHANIS {4}

ARCHIM. SAWAS ACHILLEOS and MONK MITROPHANIS {5}

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PROLOGUE

Many things have been told and have been written about the Holy LIGHT. However, no matter what has been recorded, the Holy LIGHT still remains an enigmatic phenomenon. This mysterious Light spontaneously and inexplicably pours forth every Holy Saturday from the Most

Holy and Life-giving Tomb of the Resurrected Savior Christ.

During the spring of 1952 I was able by the grace of God to venerate for the first time the sanctified places of Jerusalem. Most importantly I wanted to be present at the magnificent services of the Holy Passion in order to see the Holy LIGHT.

Since then many years have passed. The Holy LIGHT and the unique service of that special day, always remained in my soul a mystery. No one was able to give me an explanation regarding this Divine LIGHT and to satisfy the unanswered questions which had anchored in my mind.

What is the Holy LIGHT? WHAT IS THE HOLY FIREs source?

What happens during the service of every Holy Saturday when the LIGHT is to appear and which at some point its brilliance bursts into aflame?

Who receives this Divine LIGHT and then imparts it to all who are in attendance?

These questions and many more remained without answers for me.

In 1980 during Easter week, I returned for the fourth time to the Holy Land with a group of faithful Pilgrims. We felt fortunate to visit again the memorable places which made us feel more warmly and intensely the presence of God.

One morning, when there were relatively few pilgrims about, {6} our group met the Holy Man, Fr. Mitrofanis, at the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre. We saw a most amiable spare figure in this Holy Geronda. His ascetic face was aglow. His sweet gentle smile rivaled that of angels. He was of medium height. His pure white hair bore witness to the toil and the asceticism of this pious old monk. True to his duty as a vigilant guard of the Holy Tomb, he served with much fervor, faith, and devotion.

After a few minutes of greeting and making acquaintance, Fr. Mitrofanis described shocking scenes of his troubled life. He recited in detail the hardships and the sufferings he endured in order to reach the Holy Land. With humility he mentioned the honored position which he held as guard of the Holy Sepulchre. He, too, was deeply perplexed with questions, regarding the Holy LIGHT.

As confirmation of this detailed narration he told us how he finally came to witness the spontaneous appearance of the LIGHT, the Mystery of the centuries, the event which every faithful Christian desires in awe to see.

These detailed historic events as told by Fr. Mitrofanis, we made every effort, by the grace of Christ, to present in a book. We make a plea to our devout readers, that through them, may God be merciful to the now deceased Geronda, to the author, and to the translators. However a more fervent plea to the Lord is that His mercy and blessings be bestowed upon the readers of this small volume and to all those who travel to the Holy Land.

Archimandrite Savvas Achilleos Agios Georgios - Korea 162 33 Byron

Athens, Greece. {7}

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1. THE FIRST YEARS OF MY LIFE.

Miltiadis Papaioannou was the given name of the 86 year old monk about whom this book is written. He was holy, guileless, humble, and quiet as befits the devoted and faithful follower of Jesus. He was truly an exemplary figure overflowing with godliness. For 57 whole years he remained standing during the greater part of day and night as a diligent guard of the Holy Sepulchre. This Holy place is where the heart of Orthodoxy resides and from which flows endless love and grace.

On the day of his monastic ordination, Miltiadis Papaioannou received, from the Patriarch of Jerusalem DAMIANOS I, the name of MITROFANIS Papaioannou. A meeting with the Holy Geronda was able to inspire in the visitor and pilgrim an unlimited trust. His clear and sparkling eyes calmed the soul of those who conversed with him. His youthful face, in spite of his old age, appeared as if it were illumined by the LIGHT and the heavenly grace of the sanctified environs.

In the presence of such a person, one literally was to hang from every word coming from this Holy man and unreservedly to submit to the truth of whatever he said. {8}

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2. THE MEETING WITH THE HOLY GERONDA.

It was morning during which we found time for a respite, to live in our hearts and minds the Holy Passions of Christ our Savior, the Cross, the Burial, and His Resurrection.

The Holy Geronda was waiting at the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre for the first few pilgrims, who were arriving early. As soon as Fr. Mitrofanis saw us from afar, he recognized that we were Orthodox Christians from Greece. People from all over the world came to worship at the Tomb of Christ. It was not easy for one to ascertain who every pilgrim was and from where he came, but Fr. Mitrofanis had no difficulty in realizing that we were fellow countrymen. He was waiting for us to approach him, and after greeting us, he began to talk.

"Do you come from the Motherland of Greece, the free and Christian country? Welcome. May your pilgrimage be a blessing to you, my children. May Christ grant that you come every year to worship at this most sacred place."

We thanked him, we kissed his hand. And the holy man, as if we were known to him for many years, began immediately to converse with us. Little by little the warm and cordial conversation changed into an account of the life of the old ascetic. He began telling us of shocking experiences which he had survived by the grace of the Resurrected Christ. {9}

With much eagerness we wanted to hear the continuation and the end. As we listened we often held our breath as he related unbelievable events. Sometimes our eyes filled with tears of sympathy. At other times, a shiver seized us as we heard harrowing tales of his misadventures. Often we interrupted him in anticipation to learn more.

"What happened then, holy Geronda?" And he, full of emotion as if he were in the midst of these events, was reliving his hardships and his agonies. With a skillful and artistic turnabout of his words, he returned to his youthful years. After a few moments of silence, with simplicity and charm, he began to tell us his life story.

"In 1921 I was exactly 21 years old. My family was from the village of POULANTZAKI in the beautiful and renowned district of Pontos in Asia Minor called KERASOUNTA. During the days of my youth there was a great persecution of the Christian Orthodox by the Turkish Moslems, when an unprecedented slaughter of the unprotected population was a daily occurrence. Women, children, and the elderly were killed indiscriminately. The rest, in order to save their lives, fled from place to place to hide. One thousand families from our area were massacred. They were added to the legion of martyrs of the faith. Another one thousand people were arrested, imprisoned, and made to suffer unimaginable tortures. Under the pressures of the horrible tribulations, {10} afflictions, and hardships, their lives ended. Thus, they, too, received a heavenly reward for their sufferings.

For those who lived, more trials and miseries awaited them. After their unfortunate arrest, they were transferred to a distant place in Kurdistan. I was among those surviving victims. My parents and my brothers did not live. They were killed and they died for their faith and love for their homeland. I was not able to be with them, to help, or even to hear their last words. It was a real hell.

Without bread and water and with pain, fear, and agony in our hearts, heaven knows how we endured for two months the terrible wayworn trek from Kerasounta to Kurdistan. During that time we were cruelly mistreated and persecuted. Upon reaching our destination, those who survived were fewer than those who had died.

[Black and white picture](#) {11}

It is imperative that the documented but seldom mentioned facts of the Turkish genocide, as ordered by Kemal Ataturk, of the Greek population in Asia Minor be publicized. How insanely ironic that such barbarous events as those perpetrated early in the 20th century should be repeated at the close of the century. The Western Powers, who supposedly regard themselves as Christian and highly civilized, used NATO and the UN to attack unceasingly and mercilessly the helpless Serbian population, simply because they are Christian Orthodox.

For those who lived, more misery and tribulations were in store for us. There was no food or water. Bodily rest was forbidden. The harrowing journey ended with unbearable forced labor such as the first Christians were compelled to do. The production of "gravel" had destroyed the little strength of the body that was left. Abandoned to the fury and harshness of the barbarians, we were living dead who could hardly move. We were ordered to break stones, at times during the burning heat of the sun, and at other times during bitter and severe cold.

Prisoners were dying under the pressures of the desperate circumstances.

A slight respite came my way when I was ordered to distribute the little bread allowed to each prisoner. It was prepared under primitive and filthy conditions with dough in which was kneaded all kinds of offensive materials and finally baked in a sooty and grimy oven. {12}

[Black and white picture](#)

Despite the awful hardships, I felt God's mercy and love in the depths of my soul. I was thankful that my life was spared because eventually a blessing presented itself.

I say this because in this distant region of Dieberkir where I was a prisoner, I learned by word-of-mouth that nearby was a small subjugated community of Greek Orthodox Christians. After much pleading, I was granted permission to visit it. There I found a small church and the village priest.

With my few hours of freedom, I went to confession and then I received Holy Communion. I was overjoyed and I felt, in spite of the afflictions and dangers, that I was in Heaven. A mysterious sublime grace hovered over me and I was immersed in an ocean of spiritual bliss. At that moment, I made a promise to God - a heartfelt vow. {13}

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3. THE PROMISE OF MY LIFE

The Holy man remained silent for a few moments. When he raised his head, we saw a tear-filled face. Then what happened? Please tell us, Geronda? After a deep sigh, Fr. Mitrofanis continued, "When I left the Church that day enveloped in the invisible presence of Divine Grace, I raised my eyes to Heaven and said, my God, help me to survive the inflictions from my captors and to serve the Holy Land which You sanctified with Your presence on earth, where Your divine feet walked. Help me to become your servant, to minister to the holy ascetics who guard and protect your sacred places. After I am free from this barbarous and inhumane imprisonment, I want to serve, O Lord, humbly wherever I can be useful. Help me to reach there where your Grace is, and to perform even the lowest of tasks and whatever may be entrusted to me".

I said these words, Father Mitrofanis continued, and I felt inside me a great relief. An invisible hand caressed my face.

The heaviness, that was pressing on me because of my enforced confinement, left me and I felt, as if I were flying above the earth. My tired eyes filled with tears with the thoughts and feelings which seized me and did not help me to see where I was walking. I was seeing other Worlds in my mind - worlds spiritual, holy, glorious and {14} blessed. I was seeing not my slavery, the pain, the hunger, the lack of sleep and all of the other sufferings and hardships. I was seeing the Holy Lands, there where the Lord was born and was crucified.

However inside me in this blessed atmosphere of the mystical and invisible, another strange and ominous world emerged in me. It raised its threatening stature, by sowing seeds of desperation. It wanted persistently and revengefully to cut the wings of my soul. It sought to nail me down, to the earth of injustice. Before my eyes there arose the phantom of war, the dangers, the wild and inhumane slaughters, the indefinite future, the tomorrow with the unanswered questions. A battle strange and stubborn was created inside me. It struggled to strangle and to choke the heavenly feelings which delighted and thrilled my soul."

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4. THE FEARFUL WITCH.

With these thoughts which the holy man had, awful wretched memories overtook him. He felt, however, as we believed, a humble, but joyful relief because he had made a public confession to us. He told of his life in much detail. He relived all that his stormy life had endured. This recollection intensely impressed the stigmas of hardships and bitter memories on his personality. Again he lifted his face, looked at us and continued: {15} "As I was returning from the Church and being tested by the battle of my feelings, I saw from afar a woman, seemingly an apparition who was holding something in her hand. It was a piece of cloth. She had raised it so as to be seen by the people nearby and she waved it in the air sometimes to the left and sometimes to the right.

[Black and white picture](#)

As she waved it, she was shouting something in the Turkish language. Since she was yelling from a distance, it was impossible to distinguish what she was saying.

As I approached her, I gradually began to see the characteristics of her face. It was a face black and fearful. Her purple lips were swollen; her teeth, sparse and discolored.

Her eyes as red-hot coals and her whole gruesome appearance brought to mind the abyss of hell.

It really was a demon in the form of a woman. In her shouting she was boasting of her evil powers. "FALTZE (witch) FALTZE. I foretell the future I foretell the future " And in the restless movements of her body, the {16} sound of a bell which she held in her left hand, was heard.

In hearing that she could presage the future, I was tempted to use her to solve my quandaries. A question immediately arose in my mind. When will the war and the slaughter end? I wanted to know when Nothing else. This was an opportunity to shed a little light on the unknown and dark future of my life. I approached with fear, but with the determination to resolve my uncertainties. The fearful witch was a living delusion, claiming the ability to peer into the future. The wicked demon that was hiding inside her had influenced curious passers-by who in despair i wanted answers to their life problems, too.

I felt a strange force pushing me in the direction of this frightening creature. It was as if I was pulled by an invisible hand toward her and trying to join us. I took a few steps forward. Just a little space separated me from her. With a tremulous voice, I asked:

"When will this war end? When? Answer me and ask me whatever price you want."

To my agonizing question, the wild face of the witch began to quiver and to twitch. A dark evil world, wilder than the first, pushed the witch into a rage. Her eyes appeared ready to pop out of their sockets. Her face changed color. From black it became purple. Between her spaced teeth her tongue began to utter strange and peculiar words about events and incidents. Only with the help of the evil spirit could she be cognizant of her utterances. {17}

Now she continued in Turkish:

"What a handsome young man you are! How handsome! Your face shines," she screeched. And in her cackling she was heard to speak to me in broken Greek. "You received Communion. You are a cantor." This unclean spirit did not have the power to come near me, because I had received the Body and the Blood of Christ and because I had chanted for the glory of the Lord. Yes, chanting was a balsam for my troubled soul. It chased away despair. It strengthened me during the hours of my suffering.

Then these questions arose in my mind:

What are the explanations regarding light and darkness? What is the relation between God and evil? Suddenly the witch attempted to approach me with frightful screams. However no demon had the power to face the grace, which surrounded me by the fact of Holy Communion, which I had received only a little while ago. God protected me.

I backed off a few steps; I tried to keep away from her unbearable foul breath as she came towards me. In my fear I was ready to flee, but I had to ask her one thing. "How do you know all this?" However, with her mutterings, groanings, and gnashing of teeth, my fearful question was lost as a small stone disappearing in foaming waves. I remember only that she turned to me and in

desperation she replied in an agitated {18} voice, "You have no country here. Leave. Far away Leave. Far away A GREAT ONE is waiting for you Never abandon the chanting Never Never."

And in this persistent "never" her words faded away as the voice of a drowning person in a storm. Her leering gaze was seeing other worlds. Her mouth became deformed. It was filled with foam and she was shaking all over.

I was overcome. Her few words repeatedly were echoing in my ears.

"You have no country here. Leave. Far away Leave. Far away A GREAT ONE is waiting for you Never abandon the chanting Never Never"

"My God", I was saying to myself, "who told her to reveal to me these words? Help me, my God." I was so perturbed as I was returning to the camp, that I did not realize I had reached it. There, all the Christian prisoners were gathered. I walked skeptically and reached the bakery. My daily work began again.

With pain in my soul I distributed the bread of slavery to my fellow men."

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5. MY MIRACULOUS ESCAPE

"Since that day," the holy man continued, "a strange passion was born inside me. I wanted to escape, to leave, to live free. But frightening misgivings loomed to discourage me in my determination to flee.

How could I succeed with such a plan? First of all, I {19} was located in a most dangerous situation in isolated and unfamiliar territory. Even if I did succeed to escape, where would I go? From the little geography I knew, I surmised that after Kurdistan I should reach the border of Syria, then Lebanon, and vaguely I pictured Palestine in the distance. My greatest difficulty, however, was something else. What about a passport?. Somewhere along the way I would be arrested. Then what would I do? My thought was: I am a refugee and a prisoner now. I will still be a refugee and a prisoner after being arrested. I kept saying to myself, that it is better to be in any other hands except in the hands of the Turks. I will tell the truth. I will tell about my life, my pain, and my sufferings. God will enlighten those who will appear before me. I will tell them my destination. I will relate my desire and the promise of my life. God will disclose to them my innocence and through God's intervention they will help me. God, only God.

With mixed thoughts of fear, joy, and anticipation, I outlined in my mind a scheme for escape. With scrupulous care and every precaution I prepared a sack with a blanket, some bread, and some water. The rising of the sun would show me in which direction I should go. One night when I was certain that no one was awake, I made the sign of the cross, I prayed, and I slipped out into the darkness towards the exit of the camp. My escape was made with success.

No one, not even my dearly beloved fellow prisoners had the slightest notion of my plan. {20}

After my escape I began to prepare myself for the myriad unforeseen eventualities awaiting me. I realized I would have to pass through mountains and plains. I must hide whenever I see people.

I must travel continuously night and day without stopping. Only when my fatigued and tortured

body reached its limits, I would lie down, no matter where, in order to regain strength and then to continue on my way.

The first hours were frightful indeed. I was running as a deer chased by hounds. I was afraid that maybe the infidel guards would discover my absence and order a search for me. All that night was an unforgettable and perilous venture. I seemed to hear voices, screams, mutterings, and all manner of sounds all around me. I was haunted by the thought that soldiers were trying to hunt me down in order to arrest and to persecute me. In my mind I could see my captors, after discovering my escape, lash into fury with vengeance. Then I saw myself on the run, fleeing panic-stricken, so as not to be captured and returned in chains to confinement and finally to be executed.

The sunrise with its sweet smile of the day met me near the Syrian border. Joy lessened my fatigue. The fact that I was young was in my favor. I was 23 years old when I dared to risk an escape under the most hazardous conditions. I disregarded dangers, pains, and exhaustion. I had, in spite of the hardships, much strength and! endurance. I was able to confront hunger and thirst and {21} I did not succumb to the rigors I had to endure.

After I took the required measures and the necessary precautions, I entered Syria. I passed the border without anyone seeing me. I advanced quite a bit, always on pathways in the mountains. Suddenly I discovered that I was nearing an inhabited district. It was the city of Halepi.

For a while I sat to rest and to recover from the ordeals of my flight. From a vantage point on the mountainside, the town was spread down below before me.

After regaining my strength I made my way towards the city slowly waiting for the sun to set so as not to give myself away to curious eyes. I was walking steadily in the streets just as any other person. I showed neither fear nor curiosity. I ate a little bread and I filled my small container with water from the first fountain I found. I began to orientate myself towards the exit of the city. Soon I was in the direction toward my goal - Jerusalem!

I climbed mountains, following paths, wherever they were. I waded through rivers. My journey continued day and night without pause. My steps hastened in anticipation of my destiny. There was no fear in me and no loss of courage to deter my efforts. I never felt loneliness. An invisible companion seemed to be guiding me. Never in my life had I ever imagined to find myself in such strange and dire difficulties. Finally I made it safely past fierce-looking border sentinels. I hurried on and before me appeared a great magnificent building. For a few minutes {22} I looked at it with apprehension until I realized that it was a hospital.

Now I felt safe because I was in no danger to be queried. This gave me a sense of security. Taking advantage of the quietness and the isolation, I sat to rest. My feet felt heavy and it was with great difficulty that I could move them. Taking out my one and only blanket, I spread it on the ground. Tired as I was from the long trek, I fell asleep for I don't know how long. The only thing I couldn't forget was my indescribable fatigue and exhaustion. But my plan always remained the same and my destination unchanged.

At last I woke up from a terribly heavy sleep which had rested me tremendously. I went through the city and reached its bustling port. What did I notice? People all about, ships at the docks, movement, sounds! I saw the Greek flag on some of the ships and I heard the Greek language. Greece had sent ships to Beirut to pick up her persecuted citizens who had miraculously escaped from the genocide in Turkey.

Our mother country was transporting them to their free homeland for survival and safety. Faintly I

heard inside me a beckoning voice saying to me, "There's an opportunity. Don't miss it. Go to Greece now that you have the chance. No passport is required. What do you need of the Holy Land? The promise you've made, forget it. Here is a turning point in your life." {23}

I fought much with this temptation, to persist in my plans or to go to Greece? To fulfill my destiny, to keep my vow, or to forget my promise to God? No, No, I repeated. I will continue my journey and I will consider neither the toil nor the difficulties.

So I was on my way again, this time with apathy, and indifference to my movements. I begged for whatever was necessary to appease my hunger. Somehow I again oriented myself to proceed in the right direction toward the Holy Land.

I persisted in my efforts and I gave encouragement to myself with every thought about my goal. My greatest concern was the fact that I had no passport. No one, however, had asked me for any document up to this time. An invisible hand was protecting me constantly. I continued my journey the whole day and the whole night. Before dawn, there before me lay Sidon which was near the end of my destination. I had reached this coastal city after a difficult wayfaring of many days. I encountered mountains, plains, rivers, forests, and caves. I would lie down wherever I found shelter, in order to rest and to regain strength.

After going through Sidon, I reached the next large city, Tyre, also on the coast. As I approached it, the life of Christ on earth came to my mind, the places my Lord visited with His disciples. In Sidon and Tyre, idolatry had signed. In the region of these two cities, there was a Canaanite woman, an idolatress. She went to the {24} compassionate Teacher and asked Him with tears to heal her daughter who was possessed. After a brief conversation, the Lord discovered the trust of that woman, when He told her. "O woman, great is your faith! Be it done as you desire" (Matthew 15:21-28).

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6. THE UNEXPECTED MEETING

The memory of this beautiful Evangelical account seemed to dissipate my fatigue because I felt revived and strengthened to proceed. After a quick prayer I said to myself, "Only a little hardship and then, the end. Only a little courage, and then the fulfillment of my promise."

I continued to wend my way and soon entered Tyre, where again, with some begging, I obtained some food. After a little rest, I traveled on, always taking precautions, so as not to be detected and delayed.

A short distance from the city, where there was a steep uphill I climbed the mountains again because it was necessary to avoid roads and populated areas. My toil and my fatigue seemed to vanish as I chanted and prayed with every step. "If I walk through the valley of the shadow of death I shall fear no evil, for thou art with me."

Suddenly at the turn of the path, unexpectedly I met a villager. There was no time to hide. It was not easy either to retreat or to avoid the meeting. An invisible hand brought me face to face with the stranger. {25}

My meeting with him was so sudden that without realizing it I stopped cold. I looked at him in the eyes with the expression of fear on my face. Inside me I felt the urge to flee, to turn back and to

run, no matter in which direction. Something, however, held me and made me not to try anything to avoid this man.

He noticed my difficulty. He stopped and looked at me without saying anything. We both stood there, the one waiting for the other to see who would open his mouth first. I wanted to speak, but what could I say? In what language should I address even a greeting? If he asked me questions, how would I answer? For me, it was one of the most difficult moments since my escape. After I came to myself, I greeted him in the Turkish language. In the meantime, I tried to maintain some composure. While I was still perplexed about how I should react, I heard the villager greet me in Turkish also.

Fear conquered me, but at the same time, joy. With a confused feeling of relief I fell at his feet. I began to kiss them and to plead. "Please, don't give me away, don't betray me," I was telling him over and over

"Who are you?" the villager asked.

"I am a refugee from Turkey. The Turks massacred my parents, my brothers, and all my relatives. I was the only one to be spared. I was arrested with many others and we were held prisoners to be executed. Miraculously I escaped from the camp to save myself. I want to reach {26} the Holy Land, Jerusalem. That is my destination. When the villager heard my plea and learned of the hardships of my life, he began to cry. With a choking sobbing voice he told me of his own life.

"I am an Armenian. I lived like you and witnessed the most brutal slaughter the civilized world has ever known. I saw with my own eyes ferocity in its fullest madness. I too have suffered the persecutions of the Turks. Whatever you described to me, I know. Don't be afraid. I will help you in whatever way I can.

It is impossible to describe my happiness after this confession and the conversation with the villager. The exhaustion of so many days had vanished. I had the opportunity to converse in the language I knew. The most gracious Lord guided me to meet this kind person. All of the doubts and the questions I had, would be answered. I would now learn clearly and with certainty, in what direction I should go, what dangers might appear and how far was the distance that separated me from my goal. I told my Armenian friend about my dream and my plans.

He told me clearly, "If you had not met me you definite would have come across border guards. Your end would have been tragic because these sentinels are ready to shoot on sight without interrogations or investigations. Anything suspicious comes under immediate attack."

I looked upwards to heaven and thanked God. "Lord You guided my steps up to now. Please be with me until {27} the end. I beg for your protection. Please defend and direct me."

The old Armenian villager, then raised his hand and pointed toward a very high mountain and said: "You will climb there, my son. Then you will go down to the other side to reach Elma. It is a village where Latins and Kurds live. Try not to meet with police. God be with you."

I thanked him. I looked at the distant steep high mountain and I began to move on. Many hours passed;

hours of walking in order to reach and to climb the mountain. He advised me how to avoid the border guards. At the foot of the mountain was an endless plain, and at one point I distinguished the village of Elma. I definitely had to go through it in order to reach the city of Akris near Haifa.

I walked for three days and nights. The ascent and descent of the mountains completely ruined my shoes. Without any protection I was stepping on thorns, sharp stones, and splintery wood. However, nothing prevented me from running. My much abused feet had such toughness that I thought I was flying instead of walking. The toils and the hardships suddenly vanished as I was linking that I was nearing my objective.

In the beautiful city of Akris there was a Greek Immunity.

The Armenian villager had assured me of this when met him. My stay there was going to offer a pleasing {28} change. I would find people with whom to speak and to relate my problems. This would restore my strength and courage. With these thoughts, every difficulty of my life seemed to disappear.

After the hardship and the uninterrupted journey of three days and nights I reached Akris. I was certain it was that city, since I heard from afar the toll of a church bell. My eyes filled with tears.

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7. THE POLICE PATROL ON MY WAY

I had not yet recovered from my excitement, when I saw across the deserted street a police patrol. Neither man nor beast was in sight. The difficulty in which I found myself] was great. My blood froze. My knees began to buckle. I was caught up in perplexity and I did not know what to do.

Without giving heed to a gnawing fear, I took courage. I felt again an invisible hand giving me strength. I came to and regained my composure. With a natural movement I backed off a little and whispered a hasty prayer, "Protect me, my Lord, protect me in this critical situation."

My pace was steady and quiet, and my movement! natural. The bag I had on my shoulder and the staff I held made it seem as if I were a shepherd. I didn't make any suspicious movements. In this way I walked on and passed the patrol. Danger was out of the way before I realized it.

The change of my course guided me to another village {29} very small with few houses. It was on the outskirts of Akris. I didn't want to go through the village. I saw a deserted place and headed towards it. On the way there was a cave which obviously had been used by shepherds.

I stayed for the night. Every movement ceased and nothing was heard to indicate the presence of man or animal. My fatigue was so great that it took a while for me to fall asleep. I don't know for how long I slept, but when I opened my eyes, it was dawn, with the welcome sun rising.

My original plans were postponed. Since I was not about to visit Akris, my target now was Haifa.

I must have journeyed for about three hours through mountains with steep slopes, following worn pathways and narrow trails. With difficulty. I made it through the rough terrain. In the distance there was the city of Haifa. Finally I was in Palestine!

8. THE FIRST GREEK LETTERS

At this point, Fr. Mitrofanis, gave a deep sigh. His voice choked. Tears ran from his eyes and rolled down to two bony and pale cheeks. Without realizing it, those of us who listened in suspense and who were caught up in his sentiments, became at that moment participants in his offerings. His

emotions became ours, and his tears filled our own eyes. A pain tightened our hearts and full of {30} anticipation to hear more, we asked him to continue.

"My joy, Father Mitrofanis continued, was immense. My gratitude to God was great. For what He gave, I would sacrifice myself for His love. I must fulfill my PROMISE, to serve Him with all my strength.

With God's help all had gone well and the light of my dreams had dawned. A few more days, I kept repeating, a few more days and I will reach the place for which I had longed. And repeating these words I hastened to reach the city. I felt welcomed by the sight of the first houses. The sea, with its calm waves, softly and quietly announced the triumphant words of my arrival. Everything seemed to be smiling at me. If only it was known that I was one who narrowly escaped execution just a few months ago! As an animal about to be trapped, I fled in order to escape from bloodthirsty infidels. I knew with great faith that I would find someone on my way who would speak Greek with me. As I hurried on, memories, thoughts, and dreams darted through my mind. All of a sudden, there in the city of Haifa, before me appeared a beautiful and impressive structure. With its fine and distinctive architecture it seemed to be one with earth, sea, and sky."

The closer I went to that building the more I admired it. In a little while I saw a marble sign with gold letters. From afar I could see that the sign was depicted in three languages- Greek, Arabic, and English - "HOTEL {31} JERUSALEM, THE HOLY SEPULCHRE". Only the name "Holy Sepulchre" was enough to shake me. A cold sweat chilled my whole body. Tears flowed from my eyes and wet my tired face. I became dizzy and my eyesight darkened. I couldn't see anything and I passed out. I don't know for how long I was in a faint. When I came to, I got up and again I saw the Greek letters of the sign. After I was certain that they were real and not a figment of my imagination, I began bowing and kneeling. I must have done this about forty times and then I got up.

I took a few steps forward in order to find the entrance to the hotel. Then I heard a conversation in Greek. Greek words Greek language A dream or a reality? My joy was so great that hardships, sufferings and fatigue were erased from my mind.

Where was my weariness? Where were my bloody feet? Where were my hunger and thirst? What about fear and sleepless nights? All melted away. I took a few steps. The torn and faded clothes of my incarceration, my shredded shoes, my sore feet, all proved the traces of my wretchedness. The first man I met I greeted him in Greek. These first words in my own language sounded like a sweetly ringing bell in my ears.

"Where do you come from, young man?" the gentleman asked me. "From very far," I answered and my eyes filled with tears. This person was the manager of the hotel. He welcomed me and I had no idea of his important position. {32}

"Tell me where do you come from?" he inquired again in a serious and imposing tone.

"From Turkey," I answered, "from the bloodshed of Asia Minor, where I was captured by the Turks and thrown into prison.

I was to be executed, but I made a desperate escape. After arduous and formidable wanderings I have reached this place where I hear the first Greek words. For month I traveled on foot and I want to continue so that I can reach the Holy Land. I made a great PROMISE and must fulfill it.

My new friend was moved. However, as the minutes of our conversation went by, my presence

became known In a few moments I was no longer a stranger to the gentleman. Other Greeks, assistants and clerks of the hotel began to approach. Their interest became greater In a little while I found myself surrounded by a number of people who were asking to learn something with certainty from the mouth of someone who suffered am survived disastrous events in Asia Minor. News of the savagery toward the Greek population in Turkey was not only slow in reaching them, but also often distorted. No one knew exactly about the tragedy of the condition or about the cruelty of the persecutions; nor about the carnage of innocent women and children and generally of all of the Greek people who were totally helpless without weapons or allies. {33}

The martyrdom of early Christianity and that of this century are known only to a few. The news of these tragedies are kept in the background for political reasons. The persecutions, the fear, and the terror as endured by the Orthodox in the 20th century, not only equaled, but surpassed those as inflicted during the rule of the Ottoman Empire from 1453 to 1821.

"It was the 28th of October 1923," Fr. Mitrofanis continued, "an unforgettable date, the day of my arrival in the first place of freedom.

All of my countrymen began to surround me with much love and affection. They brought me new clothes to wear, and new shoes to put on my aching feet. I had a hot bath which cleansed and revived me. My new-found friends, set a bounteous table before me with deliciously cooked food, and finally I was given an immaculate bed to lay my tortured and ailing body to recover.

An ocean of love! After so many years, how could I ever forget such overwhelming kind treatment!

Fr. Mitrofanis looked up and said, In my prayers that night I asked God to reward with a special place in His heavenly kingdom those most gracious people who provided me with such loving care. After a pause, he continued, At sundown the bells of the church of Prophet Elias began to ring for Vespers. This church and the hotel, both belonged to the jurisdiction of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre whose mission was to serve the {34}

Greek community in spiritual and worshipping aspects well as for various other needs.

Soon the congregation of Orthodox Christians had arrived and the Vesper Service began. I timidly approached the cantor's stand and I began to chant in a low voice.

When the Cantor heard me, he asked me to continue. I thanked him and did his bidding taking turns with him. After the service people came to meet me and to inquire of my perils. Even Bishop Keladion asked to see me.

The Bishop was an ascetic figure, highly gifted in discerning the hearts of those near him. He invariably judged rightly any person he saw. He was not mistake about my presence. He immediately surmised the religious zeal, which I had in spite of my young age. hh wanted to talk with me of the things he had heard.

I, afraid and full of respect for the clergy, when heard that the Bishop asked to see me, I began to tea reluctant. Many different thoughts passed through m mind. "How would I face the Bishop?" I was asking myself. What does the Bishop want of me? Maybe Go enlightened him, and he wants to help me to realize n burning desire to serve in the Holy Land."

Full of agony and embarrassment, I went with custodian. It was my first time in a Bishop's office. The door of the great, imposing and beautiful reception room opened. On the walls in ornate frames were portraits the Patriarchs who had served in the past. Behind the {35}

Bishop's desk, were icons of the Lord and of the Most Holy Virgin Mary Theotokos. The floor was covered with modest rugs. The chairs around the room with their Byzantine carvings were all symmetrically placed in the great hall. The atmosphere of the room created in the visitor a sense of awe and reverence.

The Bishop beckoned me "Come, my son. Who are you? Beautiful and melodious is your voice, charming as that of the nightingale that praises God in hymns during the quiet spring night. I have learned that you are a refugee, who suffered many hardships and I was moved as I heard of your ordeals. I ask that you stay with me. My paternal affection and unlimited love will surround you always. You will be at my right hand."

At that moment, I did not know what to think of these unexpected words. I took a few steps forward and as I approached him, I lowered my head to the floor in adoration and upon arising I kissed his hand".

My son, such humility is not necessary." I answered him. "This is not something of the moment. From Ghildhood I was taught by my pious parents to show Aspect to Bishops and Priests of our Holy Church."

The Bishop remained silent as he listened.

I could see that he was thinking of something in a profound way. He raised his eyes, looked at me, and said, My son, I appreciate your character and I take into consideration the things your parents have instilled in your {36} soul. I want you to stay with me. You will live comfortable here. You will chant and you will serve God, Whom you have loved."

I thought my ears were deceiving me. It was unbelievable what I was hearing. Here I am an illiterate young man, with no higher education, and with no special abilities. What does this Bishop want of me that he promises me so much? Instinctively I opened my mouth and with the proper respect I said to him, "Your Grace I thank you and I am moved by your paternal interest and your love. I, however, have to fulfill the promise c my life. The promise is one, to reach the Holy Land. have gone through "fire and the sword," through danger and unimaginable sufferings, hungry and thirsty. I had gone without sleep and I have walked endlessly. Bu the Lord gave me strength and courage for my survive It is a wondrous marvel how God brought me here. Mar Psalms express for me the trials I endured. Now how cna I not fulfill my PROMISE? Whatever I asked of Go he denied me nothing. How can I renege on the PROMISE I have made in His Holy Name? I thank yo but my decision remains constant and firm. I want to full my objective even if it's my last moment on earth."

Before this steadfastness of my character and the finality of my resolve, the Bishop, full of emotion, didnt want to pressure me any further. Our meeting, ever for only few minutes gave him the opportunity to see {37} many things. Immediately he understood my intent, and quickly he reached his conclusions. He looked at me in his fatherly manner and told me, "My son, I admire the determination in your noble decision. I appreciate your principles. I do not want to become an obstacle in your aim. Whether you serve Christ here, or in His Holy places, the exact same service you will offer to the Patriarchate. I will help you to reach your final intent."

9. JERUSALEM. THE CITY OF GOD.

With these words the Bishop ended the matter of his proposition. He withdrew his attempt to persuade me to remain in Haifa at the Metochion. After our conversation, preparations for my

departure remained. It was November 1, of the year 1923, the day that was the beginning of the rest of my life, a life blessed with the richness of the grace of God. My train journey to the Holy City was uneventful but pleasant, as I basked in anticipation of my new existence. Finally in a few hours ^V guide and I reached Jerusalem, the holiest of cities.

Truly, how can I relate the impressions of that first day? My thoughts and aspirations at last turned into an incredible reality.

Now every Biblical passage of the life of Christ would come more alive in my mind and more intensely for me.

It was astounding to think that my dreams and desires {38} were nearing actualization. My heart was overflowing! with joy in the knowledge that my PROMISE could be fulfilled.

We entered the walled part of the city at the gate of, David near where once stood the Royal Palace of David.

An Arab-speaking Orthodox Priest was there waiting to welcome us. The narrow streets accommodated pedestrians only. In order to get about one was obliged to walk the countless uphill and downhill stone streets to reach the Patriarchate.

It was about 2 o' clock in the afternoon when the bell of the Holy Church of the Resurrection began to ring and to be heard all over the City. Just as a tape grasps sound and preserves it for many years, in the same way I can still hear these joyful bells pealing with their sacred and imposing toll. Every time I hear them, I am reminds of my first days in Jerusalem.

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10. MY FIRST PILGRIMAGE

Fr. Mitrofanis paused for few moments and lowered his head. He brought his crossed hands that were resting on his chest up and with them he covered his eyes.He remained thus for a while and then he continued.

"After the sounding of the bells, I saw movement on behalf of the whole personnel of the Patriarchate. There were staff-bearers with special uniform and minister {39} Following were novices in their monastic black robes and caps. Then when the bells rang again, eighteen bishops and priests began to come down towards the entrance of the Church of the Resurrection.

[Black and white photo](#)

Jerusalem and the Church of the Resurrection

I was speechless at the sight. With reverence and admiration I followed what seemed to be Heavenly Orders of Angels and Archangels lined up in order to glorify God. The whole priestly order formed an Angelic Procession here on earth for the vesper service.

Before I could realize it, I too found myself inside the Holy Church of the Resurrection. Impatiently, I was searching with my eyes right and left to find where the {40} Tomb of Christ was. Nearby stood a venerable monk, Fr. Artemios.

"Father," I asked. "Where is the Tomb of Christ?" "Here, my son," he answered. And with his right hand he pointed to a very small, but high chapel-like structure, built with magnificence and grandeur.

At the entrance of the chapel I saw that people reverently were going in to worship. Above the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre were sacred lamps lighted and burning with pure olive oil. I counted them. There were 34 kantilia.

When Father Artemios saw me looking at them, he explained to me. "Here, my son, are people of different languages and nationalities with their own interpretations of Christianity. All have rights here and all are struggling to take from the Orthodox their authority over the Holy Shrines. Of the golden lighted lamps, 14 belong to the Orthodox, 13 belong to the Armenians and 7 to the Latins (Roman Catholics). Fr. Artemios then motioned for me to move on.

I approached with great awe. My knees were trembling I bent over and went inside the first sanctum of the Holy Sepulchre. There before me on top of a small table-like marble column was a piece of stone in a glass case. I asked a monk who was standing there if he would kindly tell me what it was. He answered, "Here is part of the stone slab that the Angel rolled from the Tomb. Only the portion was saved. The rest of it, piece by piece, was {41} taken by kings and princes, rulers and simple folk. This small part remained and was preserved through the ages as a holy relic. Now it is used as an altar during the Divine Liturgy."

I raised my eyes to examine closely the sacred surroundings. I saw more golden, lighted kantilia hanging, lined-up one next to the other. As I stood there looking at them, the monk continued. "Do you see these lamps in here? Five belong to the Orthodox which we have to light them every day. The other five belong to the Latins. The four belong to the Armenians and the one that hangs alone belongs to the Copts of Egypt."

After pausing in the first part of the chapel, I proceeded in wonderment to enter the inner sanctum where the Tomb was. Here the second entrance was very small compared to the first.

The height of the doorway being lower, made it impossible to enter in an upright position. Therefore a person had to bend forward to gain entrance.

Momentarily my eye caught an inscription over the lintel which read:

"Why do you seek the living among the dead? He has risen"

These were the words of the angel who addressed the Myrrh-bearing Women on Easter morning. I felt that the same angel appeared before me, that he showed me the place where the disciples had buried Christ. I proceeded {42} with bowed head, facing the hallowed Tomb. Trembling I fell on my knees and went near to worship. I could not hold back the tears falling on the Tomb of Christ.

"This," I said, "is the end of a long and agonizing journey. Here I was, not in imagination, but in reality. I knelt for a long time while tears of my gratitude flowed freely to thank HIM who brought me here."

[Black and white photo](#)

The Crucifixion

After my veneration with head bowed, I backed out and took leave with overwhelming awe. When

I came out of the Tomb of Christ, I found Fr. Artemios waiting for me. At that moment my keen desire was to visit Golgotha where Christ was crucified. It was time for the vesper {43} service in the most sacred Church of the Resurrection. Crowds of people had gathered to attend. Father Artemios was watching me, and seeing my impatience, he took me by the hand to where Calvary was.

Immediately I found myself before a climb of very high steep steps. Without difficulty I ascended. When I reached the top there before me was depicted the Crucified Christ. As I was watching His Holy face falling to the right, my eyes fell on the grieved face of His Most Holy Mother and that of St. John. What I beheld, so stirred the core of my heart and soul that again my eyes filled with tears.

I felt so moved that I thought I was going to faint. It seemed beyond belief that I was actually here at the place of the sacrifice of the Lamb and Son of God. Here I tasted the sorrow and pain of the Most Holy Theotokos and the beloved disciple. Here I was experiencing the Divine Sacrifice for the salvation of humanity.

When I recovered from the overpowering emotions which had welled up in me, I went near to kneel and to Pray. A fragrance seemed to emanate from the Cross. One has to be extremely sensitive to the divinity of the Place to detect the sweet and delicate scent which is a sign of the glory of God. Here, the pilgrim at this awesome scene of Calvary, is transported to a heavenly world.

Having expressed my earnest devotions I humbly lowered volumes of gratitude to HIM who was crucified for my salvation. I took leave with reverence and deepest {44}

[Black and white photo](#)

The removal of Christ from the Cross

humility. The vesper service had just begun and I could hear the first hymn as it was being chanted. I approached the Cantor's stand and I began to accompany in a soft voice. I cannot forget with how much feeling I was chanting this first evening, the hymns of our Church "Lord, I have cried unto Thee" (Psalm 141).

The vesper of that day still dwells in my soul and I often relive it in my mind.

When everyone left, I remained almost alone to enjoy the beauty and the holiness of everything inside the church. As I turned to leave, a saintly old ascetic approached me. It was a fragile figure, an almost skeleton-like body hidden inside his monk's robe. His presence evoked deep respect. {45} I remember him as a shadow rather than as a person.

It was Fr. Gerasimos, the Sacristan of the Holy Sepulchre. He guarded whatever was holy and sacred as preserved today by the Patriarchate of Jerusalem, from various holy vestments, to the Byzantine sacred vessels. The position and the office of the Sacristan of the Holy Sepulchre is very significant and requires a great sense of responsibility for the safekeeping of all the relics. Fr. Gerasimos began to converse with me. He asked where I came from and what I planned to do. Briefly, I told him of my origin and my life story. I then revealed to him my dream and my longing. I told him about the PROMISE I had made to serve the Holy Sepulchre to be one of the guards.

When our conversation ended I made three prostrates to the holy man. I kissed his hand and added, "Holy Father, I want to ask of you a favor. Would you please hear confession from me?"

Fr. Gerasimos agreed with much kindness and on that same day I had my first confession in the Holy Land. From then on, I felt inside me a sense of peace and security because I had a spiritual father, a Heavenly Gift, God's Blessing.

Fr. Gerasimos encompassed me with much love and affection. The Sacrament of Confession, created in my life a great and holy spiritual bond. After my penance Fr. Gerasimos asked me. "Do you want to remain with me, my son?" {46}

"With all my heart, holy Father," I answered, "I'll serve wherever you order me, anywhere in the Holy Land. It was for the love of Christ that I traveled many miles through innumerable adversities."

When Fr. Gerasimos heard my plea, he accepted me and made me a novice. I obeyed him and I carried out all of his orders. An unimaginable inner calmness took over my being and I felt a deep joy. I can never remember embittering my spiritual father. I practiced great obedience and executed every task that he put to me for my spiritual progress.

Six months passed since that day. I didn't know what was outside the Church of the Resurrection - if there was even a city, because I never tried to visit it and to know it. No other thought occupied me about what the rest of Jerusalem was like. I was never curious to explore the environs. Only one thing occupied me, my obedience to my Geronda. My concern turned entirely to the vigil services, to fasting and to prayers. Only these took possession of me. Only to these, my concerns lay. Finally the chanting to God was the quintessence of my spiritual life.

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11. MY ASSIGNMENT.

Fr. Mitrofanis continued, "All this time I followed rigorous trial period. One day I was notified to go to the Patriarchate. I was told that something special would be announced to me. {47}

My whole life and conduct had been made known to the Patriarch Damianos I. Why did he want to see me? Questions arose in my mind and I wondered what Father had in store for me. Did he want to have me discharged? Had I done anything wrong and I was not aware of it? Did he want to announce something in my favor or something against me? With these thoughts I prepared myself for the worst.

With an escort, we made our way to the Patriarchate. I was led to the Holy Patriarch who was sitting at his desk. "My son," he said when he saw me, "your conduct in the Patriarchate, your obedience, and your whole life became known to me. From today I assign you as GUARD of the Holy SEPULCHRE. You must perform your duties with zeal and devotion. You must serve the Holy Sepulchre with faith and self denial and may the Omniscient Lord reward you in His Heavenly Kingdom. With the blessing of God and my prayers you will advance in virtue. May God be with you, my son."

After making my prostrates, I kissed the hand of the holy Father, thanked him with evident emotion, and departed. I could not stop the tears from taking hold of me. At long last my dream would be fulfilled. Who would ever believe that I, with a minimum of education and with limited skills and abilities, one day would be honored with such a holy duty! How did the Patriarch ever decide to choose me! Only God knows. I had made my PROMISE {48} and today He deemed me worthy to realize it. I thank you my Lord, I thank you.

Wonder and joy had flooded my being and I kept saying, I, a GUARD of the Tomb of Christ! What an astounding thought to be there in such a role! The position is enviable and many dream of it. But only those who are called from God become worthy of it. I myself felt unworthy and attributed the whole matter to a miracle.

The history of this duty has its roots from the time that Christ was buried and guards were placed on watch "Les His disciples come by night and steal him away and say unto the people, 'He is risen from the dead' (Matthew 27:64)".

Only those of the Orthodox faith are allowed the privilege of this noble and exalted calling. Therefore non-Orthodox are not among those who guard the Tomb of Christ.

And Father Mitrofanis, continued to tell us, "From that day on when the greatest honored duty was given to me, I thanked God each hour and tried in every way, with every sacrifice to be consistent in my responsibilities. As Guard of the Tomb of Christ I had to be alert for any irreverence or unexpected desecration. Multitudes of faithful as well as non-Orthodox Christians from all parts of the world came as pilgrims to the sacred Tomb. They came, and without anyone urging them, or suggesting to them, or compelling them, they fell on {49} their knees to venerate. They would light one or more candles, to express their devotion and their love to the Resurrected Christ and Savior.

Millions of candles are lit during the year. No other shrine on earth attracts so many pilgrims. It is an endless veneration of the Life-giving Tomb, Golgotha, and the Manger of the Birth of Christ. The faithful ask themselves, what attracts such a multitude of people where everyone kneels and worships at an empty Tomb.

"Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your works," Father Mitrofanis said, and made the sign of the cross. His experience allowed him to see many things and to become a witness of signs, tears, and prayers of so many faithful! He continued: "The Guard of the Tomb is also responsible for the ceremony of the Holy Light which is passed out to the people, as a Divine and Heavenly blessing every year on Holy Saturday. This blessing is also enjoyed by non-Orthodox, as well, who accept the authenticity of the faith. There are those who out of ignorance or disbelief deny the genuineness of Orthodoxy. As a result there are now thousands of schisms and heresies all over the world."

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12. MY NEW GERONDA (Spiritual Father).

Since the day of my appointment I was assigned to another Spiritual Father, Fr. Anatolios, an old ascetic and guard of the Sepulchre who would be responsible for me {50} as my Geronda. I obeyed his every command. He was strict and he would not compromise with anything that was against his conscience and his duty. He kept at abeyance contradictions and did not welcome doubters with their idle questioning. When he gave an order, he wanted it to be carried out with obedience and humility the two distinguishing characteristics of a devout monk.

I began, therefore in silence and obscurity to execute whatever he asked of me. I refrained from being conspicuous and wanted my services to be performed a secretly and as humbly as possible. Being dedicated to God, I practiced submission and self-abasement. They became as second nature to me. Very soon I was robed in the ceremony of the monastic ordination.

The solemn induction impressed upon me the gravity of my new role and of my mission and duties.

During then rites, the Patriarch Damianos I, renamed me from Miltiades, to the servant of God, Mitrofanis, and I was shorn. Now I was the namesake of an outstanding figure of the Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople in the service of Christ.

For a moment, Fr. Mitrofanis showed that he wanted to end his story. He was afraid that he may have tired his listeners; but we were eagerly awaiting to hear more and to follow his life story. Most importantly we wanted him to tell us how he was able to get a glimpse of the Holy Light. He resumed his narration and all of us again {51} became his audience who with faith and confidence took in his every word.

In ardent anticipation, we wanted to learn of the miracle of the Holy LIGHT which occurs every Holy Saturday. The phenomenon of a Divine LIGHT appearing within the confines of the Sacrosanct Sepulchre filled our minds with wonder and amazement and perhaps with a tinge of dubiousness.

How could this LIGHT burst forth without human intervention?

Could it be an illusion or was fraudulence present? Could there be secrets known only to a few people? Could it be that we outsiders are duped? All these and many more questions tossed about in our misgivings.

Through the centuries people of all faiths sought explanations for the mystical by asking for answers responsible, authentic, and real. For us, it was a great opportunity. We were seeking to learn, because Fr. Mitrofanis had won our trust. For fifty-seven whole years he was the guard of the Holy Sepulchre. We could not let such an opportunity escape us. We asked him to continue to tell whatever he knew, whatever he saw.

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13. THE HOLY LIGHT: THE CONTINUING MIRACLE OF THE CENTURIES.

Fr. Mitrofanis saw our desire and our persistence. He was touched by our fervent interest. He saw with how {52} much attention we listened. As he debated whether to continue or to stop, all of a sudden Divine Grace invisible visited him and his face shone. His clear eyes changed to sparkling mirrors. He looked at us with much affection and continued. The Holy LIGHT, he told us, is not defined. No one can localize or contain it. It is unlimited and interminable. In the past, as much as I can remember, many have written about the Holy LIGHT. Chrysostomi Papadopoulos mentions it in his book "The History of the Church of Jerusalem". Also, on the same subject, T.P. Themelis wrote under the title "The Ceremony of the Holy LIGHT" on the one hundredth anniversary of the most sacred Church of the Resurrection. If my memory serves me well, Adamantios Koraes wrote the book "Dialogue about the Holy LIGHT in Jerusalem."

Great and praiseworthy was the letter of Nikiforos Theotokis to Mihailo Lariseon, who asked about the Holy LIGHT. In the Code of 1457 there is an important, but unpublished dissertation about "The Sepulchre LIGHT" by Neofytos Kafsokalivitis. Many other similar works were written at times, which I cannot recall now.

We truly marveled at his memory and knowledge about the Holy LIGHT, but he interrupted our admiration when he told us, "I am sorry that I cannot discuss with you either the historical or scientific aspects of the Holy LIGHT. I will tell you what my experience has taught me for so many

years. I will describe to you {53} in detail whatever I was able to see with my own eyes. My faith in God was and is infinite. He raised me to the heights of Divine Grace. He filled a tremendous empty space in my heart which was full of doubts, thoughts, and questions about the LIGHT.

How many people, even today feel an emptiness in their being which torments them.

Mysteriously somehow I was made worthy and gained a glimpse of the Holy LIGHT! Then the tremendous void which weighed on me vanished. There was not a trace of doubt to prey on my mind. The Grace of the Holy LIGHT allowed me to witness an event which rarely a person is able to experience at first hand.

In 1925, when I undertook, to serve as a Guard of the Tomb of Christ, I was obsessed with the question: What is the Holy LIGHT? At that time, Easter was nearing. Until then, in all of the past years, I remained afar from the Holy Sepulchre. I was an observer, just as other people were. I was a pilgrim among thousands of pilgrims. But now, things had changed radically. I was no longer an apathetic but faithful spectator. I was responsible for whatever would take place according to the order and the service of the Holy LIGHT. Fr. Anatolios, my austere spiritual father, would not accept any disobedience to his orders, nor allow any hesitations and doubts to loom. When finally the Holy Week of the Passion of the Lord was approaching, he told me in his strict tone of voice, "Listen and pay {54} attention as to what you must prepare on the morning of Holy Saturday. At 9 o'clock you will take 5 kilos of pure beeswax which has been blessed beforehand for forty days during the daily Divine Liturgies. It is intended only for the service of the Holy LIGHT. You will heat the wax in a special utensil, which is set apart for this purpose. The softened wax will be used to seal the entrance of the Tomb until the time for the Patriarch to enter.

At 10 o'clock you will hear a rhythmical tapping. Special selected guards, in impressive traditional uniforms, with their long wooden staffs, clear the way through throngs of people. In such a manner the procession with the Patriarch and a retinue of holy clergy proceed toward the Church of the Resurrection. Everyone stands in awe before the beauty and splendor of the ceremonial march into the house of God. The Orthodox faith finds it befitting to honor our Lord Jesus Christ with the finest in beauty and resplendence.

For a moment Fr. Anatolios paused and then remarked, "Fr. Mitrofanis, I see that you are carried away with what I am telling you. It is time to stop. Later you will hear more, but for now you must assure me that you are ready to undertake the whole responsibility within the Holy Sepulchre. It is the first time after so many years that I will not take part to serve in this ceremony. You will bring to completion your mission with utmost care and attention. Contrary to this, if you fail, you, as much as I who have {55} entrusted this service to you, must leave the Patriarchate. Be very careful, Fr. Mitrofanis."

I reassured him that I was paying attention precisely to the letter and to each detail. After he was convinced of the truth of my words, he continued, "The Patriarch then will enter the Holy Church of the Resurrection. Following him will be the leaders of other dogmas, the Armenians, the Latins, the Abyssinians, the Copts, and the Syrians who will go to the Patriarchal Throne, all in line, one after the other, to kiss the hand of the Patriarch. By following this established order, they then have the right to receive the Holy LIGHT from the hand of the Patriarch. This significant event is an official recognition, that only Orthodoxy possesses the TRUTH and the Apostolic Tradition in its entirety. The Armenians at one time wanted to obtain the right to be the only ones to enter the sanctuary of the Sepulchre for the Holy LIGHT ceremony.

When I heard this shocking fact, I asked with much distress, "Holy Father, how could they want to displace the Orthodox from this time-honored position as successors to Christ and His Apostles?"

He replied thus, "No, here is what happened. When in the year of 1517 A.D., the Arabs occupied Jerusalem, the Armenians took advantage of their presence. They approached the Moslem governor and with a gift of gold, asked to be allowed the privilege to receive the Holy light. This they asked and this they succeeded. They {56} also implored to him that the Orthodox be forbidden entrance to the Holy Sepulchre for the sacred ritual."

Up to this time such orders were unheard of and unprecedented. The unexpected deviations resulted in unimaginable sadness and distress for the Orthodox faithful. Holy Saturday dawned and the most Holy Church of the Resurrection was closed to all of the Orthodox. Even the Patriarch and the clergy were not allowed to enter. With them gathered a host of Orthodox pilgrims from all parts of the world. On that day there was much lamentation and wailing. All of the faithful with tears were praying to God, to forestall this unheard-of injustice. They were saddened by the unexpected action of the Armenians against the Orthodox. Precisely above the compound of the Church of the Resurrection, the Moslem Emir was sitting at the pinnacle of a minaret. He selected) such a place in order to see every movement. He was overcome by the agonizing question: "What is going to happen now?" For this reason he was following every movement with undivided attention.

The patriarch was kneeling at the entrance of the Most Holy Church. He was holding in his hand the bundle of the thirty-three candles and was praying. Tears streamed down his face as he pleaded to God:

"Lord, You who abhors injustice, heed the prayers of your children. Grant that Your glory may appear through. {57} Your miracle and do not deprive Your Holy LIGHT from Your faithful people."

Fr. Anatolios, was observing me and he said, "I am certain that you have seen the column at the left-hand side of the doorway to the Church. Surely you have noticed that there is a blackened vertical split in a portion of the column. It has been that way for a little more than 400 years.

"I observed this detail, my Father," I said, "and even something more. Full of perplexity I bent over to examine it closely and I discovered a delicate fragrance coming from this stone column, the same fragrance that continually comes from Golgotha, where the Cross had been."

On that fateful Holy Saturday in 1517, the Divine LIGHT did not visit the Holy Sepulchre where the Armenians were in charge and waiting. Instead, before the amazed eyes of clergy and pilgrims, the Holy LIGHT flashing brilliantly, struck the column with the sound of a forceful wind. Instantaneously the stone column was split and blackened near the bottom. The prayers of the Patriarch and his people were answered.

Many who do not believe ask, "Does the Holy LIGHT give off smoke and blackens wherever it touches?" Don't forget that the Holy LIGHT does not cease to have the same quality as a common flame and every flame has smoke.

"Then why is it called Holy LIGHT?"

"Because it comes from the Holy Tomb spontaneously {58} without human intervention. It is given through the grace of the Holy Spirit, which appears as a brilliant light at first and then as a "tongue of fire" just as on the day of Pentecost to the Disciples of Christ."

Every year at the precise hour when this LIGHT is to appear in the Holy Tomb, a pure white CLOUD comes before the Patriarch. When an intense luminescent radiance appears he then lifts with piety and faith the candles he is holding. Suddenly wondrously and inconceivably they are

ignited.

Now can you imagine what took place in the courtyard of the church? All of the faithful, the clergy, the attendants, all burst out in loud ringing voices and doxologies. The bells of the Church began to ring joyfully. The whole of nature, everything, all of Heaven and Earth, all were sending songs of glory and thanksgiving to the True God. It is practically impossible to describe the delight and happiness of that day.

Then an act of self-sacrifice was made that has been historically recorded. The Moslem Emir, who was following everything from the high Minaret, was transformed into an enthusiastic witness of Orthodoxy. As soon as he saw this miracle, he cried loudly:

"Great is the faith of the Christians! I now believe in the Resurrected Christ. I worship Him as a True God"

At the same time, with this acknowledgement and {59} declaration, he jumped from the Minaret to an empty space in the courtyard of the Holy Church. And behold the miracle! Nothing happened to him. He suffered no injury by his fall. The Moslems were embarrassed. As soon as they heard his confession and observed the courage of the Emir, they rushed over, seized him, and beheaded him on the spot. They considered him a betrayer of the faith of Islam. Mohammed did not want traitors on his side. The Christians gathered with great love and care the body of the martyr who was baptized in his own blood. They buried him as a faithful son of Orthodoxy and as a martyr of Christ. His Holy remains are preserved and are kept in the Holy Monastery of the Great Panagia (the Most Holy Virgin Mary)."

"And the Armenians, Geronda? What happened to them?"

"The Armenians after this chagrin came out of the Church and disappeared. A long time passed until they reappeared in the Holy Land. Never again did they attempt to displace the Orthodox from the Holy Sepulchre.

Now, that you have heard something that you didn't know until now, listen and pay attention to what you must do in your role as servant of the Tomb. You must bring your mission to a favorable end.

After the Liturgy in the Church of the Resurrection {60} on Holy Saturday, the Patriarch blesses heads of other faiths. He then proceeds toward the entrance of the Holy Sepulchre. There all around are seated high ranking government, civil, and military officials from the vicinity and from different parts of the world.

[Black and white photo](#)

The Great Entrance to the Church of the Resurrection

From 10 o'clock in the morning of Holy Saturday until 11 o'clock, a rigorous search for any instrument or device for igniting is made inside the Holy Sepulchre. Above this most holy monument of Orthodoxy hang 43 golden vigil lights which are lit day and night. {61}

13 belong to the Orthodox 13 belong to the Latins

13 belong to the Armenians and 4 to me Coptic Monophysites

All of these lights form a golden curtain. They are like torchbearing Heavenly Orders suspended over the Tomb of Christ. Inside the Holy Sepulchre, at the last hour, only authorized representatives of the Armenians, the Latins, and the Copts, together with the Orthodox enter the Tomb with the purpose to put out the 43 vigil lights. Precautions are taken so that at no time, either by error or intentionally, a vigil light remains lit or that anything suspect is present.

After a complete and thorough search is made in the Holy Sepulchre, a second and a third search follow to make certain that neither a person nor anything forbidden, exists inside the Tomb. Only then do the inspectors come out.

At that time, 11 o'clock, procedures for the sealing of the Tomb are ready to begin. The blessed and softened beeswax now will be used to secure two pure white ribbons in the shape of an "X" over the door of the Holy Sepulchre.

After the wax has been put on the four ends of the ribbons, then at the exact center where the ribbons cross, more wax will be deposited. The rest of it will be placed all around the door. Finally every point is to be stamped by the official seal of the Patriarchate. {62}

These procedures remind us of the desperate efforts of the Hebrew leaders who wanted to seal the Tomb of the Leader of Life. They made every effort to take all of the measures they could to guard the dead Christ. They went to the Roman ruler of Jerusalem, Pontius Pilate, in order to receive permission according to law. "Sir," the Pharisees said to Pilate, "we remember that the deceiver said, I will live again. After three days I will rise" The Roman governor answered, "You have your guards, go your way, make it as sure as you can." So they went, and made the sepulchre secure, sealing with a stone, and setting a watch." (Matthew 27:63-66).

After the sealing of the Tomb, a magnificent and majestic procession takes place three times around the Holy Sepulchre. In the lead are the Patriarchal banners, altar boys bearing candles, crosses, and emblems of six-winged angels. The Patriarch follows with a host of priests in golden vestments. All around can be heard the chantings of the Byzantine hymns with their sacred tones. Pilgrims observing this solemn procession feel transported to Heaven. Rather heaven descends to earth and each pilgrim even briefly, becomes a citizen of the celestial Kingdom

At the end of the third time around the Patriarch stands at the entrance of the Holy and Life-giving Sepulchre. Before all of the officials and the pilgrims, the Patriarch is searched again by the vigilant attendants. Every suspicion that something capable of producing {63} light inside the Holy Sepulchre must be eradicated. Then the Patriarch, arrayed with the Holy Stole (Epitrahilion) and the Archieratical Chasuble (Omoforon), is ready, to enter the Holy Sepulchre. Precisely at 12 o'clock noon of Holy Saturday the ribbons of the entrance are cut and the door is unsealed and opened.

"You will be mindful," Fr. Anatolios told me, "to place carefully on the marble slab of the Life-giving Tomb the holy kantila (unlit) with its special golden case."

At this point a strange expression appeared on the calm face of Fr. Mitrofanis. The tone of his voice changed suddenly. He was reliving all that was discussed with his Geronda. And with gestures that expressed the disturbance of his soul, he told us:

"As soon as I heard 'kantila' a great cloud of doubt arose in my mind. 'Kantila!' I said to myself. 'What is a kantila doing in the Holy Tomb, since the Holy LIGHT is coming down from Heaven?' The hesitation and the internal battle of doubt was evident in my eyes. As a flash of lightning, my face took a form of surprise. The sad announcement of the command of my elder, was unexpected.

My elder, Fr. Anatolios, saw my hesitation, but he paid no attention and continued: "After this, you are to place on the Tomb the Holy Book that is kept at the vestry of the Holy Sepulchre. Precisely at the page where the holy prayers of the Holy LIGHT are found, you will place a thick candle." {64}

At hearing the second command and the words 'thick candle' whatever faith I had vanished. A black cloud of unfaithfulness tried to cover my whole soul.

"Candle?" I asked with astonishment and dismay. What is the need of the candle? I didn't quite finish my exclamation of doubt, and as thunder in time of serenity, the most strict and severe voice of my elder was heard.

"Where is your faith?" Where is your obedience, the greatest virtue of a monk? Where is your piety? Have you lost them all? You heard 'candle' and you are overcome with unfaithfulness. The devil fought with you and has conquered you. He put in you thoughts of impiety and disrespect. Don't you know that our Orthodoxy is supported by faith, and the faith of Christians endures in whatever trial or endeavor? Be on your guard not to lose your soul. Be careful, Fr. Mitrofanis, be careful... Don't trifle with the Divine. With devotion and prudence you must obey me and do whatever I tell you. Don't betray our blameless faith."

Sternly he got up from his chair, "Do you have anything to ask now?"

"No," I answered him. I made a prostrate and I kissed his hand.

"Go, and may God be with you. Do everything with accuracy and in the correct order." {65}

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14. EASTER WITHOUT JOY.

I remember, Fr. Mitrofanis continued, that inside me-after my meeting with Fr. Anatolios, a huge void took hold of me. The presence of the 'kantila' and the 'candle' tortured me. I was fighting with these two. Just as two giants battle so that one may win over the other, in the same way, a similar war, endless it seemed, was inside me. Faith resisting disbelief, reality to doubt, and tangible events in a dark game at the expense of the faithful world brought me into a painful turmoil. Here were undesirable visitors (demons), where one does not tolerate the other. Faith was there inside me, unshakable as granite. Doubt, however, began to pierce it and to devour its foundations and persistently to bring it to ruins. Faith in God is alive for things seen and unseen, but always believed.

As Apostle Paul said, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." (Hebrews 11:1). Doubt, on the other hand, tries with its presence to upset, to uproot and to destroy whatever holy and divine is created through the grace of God in the soul of man.

"With these events and the memories of the drama of my life, the curtain of Holy Week opened. The first solemn hymn of the Church was heard to inspire true believers. With its deep meanings it led every soul to participate in the Passion of the Savior. "The sublime sufferings, on this day, shine upon the world as a Light of salvation." In the meantime pilgrims began to arrive {66} in great numbers so that they could observe and share in the Passion and later to rejoice in the Resurrection of Christ. I, in the meantime, undertook my duties. While one day succeeded the next and Holy Friday was nearing and then Holy Saturday, I was suffering from a great dread. I asked myself:

Would I be able to bring to a satisfactory completion all that my elder expected of me? I lacked experience, and courage had abandoned me. After almost two months of strict fasting accompanied by persistent and demanding duties, I felt that I was about to succumb. However, the thought of my vow to serve, revived me.

When Holy Saturday came I reviewed my duties. The sealing wax was ready to be prepared as instructed by my geronda. I obtained the white ribbons which would be used to seal the Tomb. Finally I prepared the holy kantila and placed the great thick candle at the appropriate page in the Book of Holy Prayers. All this time I was at the mercy of exhaustion. Weak knees and profuse perspiration were the result of my fear and anxiety for my final achievement.

I continued working faithfully at my tasks. The difficulties of the urgent responsibilities pressed upon me without mercy. Everything seemed to be lined up against me and threatening me. Would I survive until the end or would my strength abandon me? Conquered by the thought of success or failure, the last hours of the critical {67} phase of my mission were within reach. With the help of God (because I lacked the required strength to continue), everything, to the last detail would be in readiness. When the Holy Sepulchre was checked for the last time and all was carefully arranged, I completed the final additions. I placed the holy kantila in its special golden case, and the Holy Book of Prayers with the thick candle between the proper pages. Then I departed.

The Holy Sepulchre was sealed. I checked for the last time every item and I took my place near the entrance. After the last round of the procession, at precisely 12 o'clock noon the Tomb was opened when the sealing wax and the ribbons were removed from the door. The Patriarch entered first. He was followed by the Armenian priest, who as an attendant, was to observe every move of the Patriarch and then to wait in the outer chamber. The Patriarch proceeded to the inner sanctuary.

After what seemed a lengthy interval, suddenly the Holy LIGHT made its appearance flashing through every space and in every direction in the Most Sacred Church of the Resurrection. As the LIGHT flitted about and touched on to wicks of kantilia and candles, many were uncannily ignited.

All were rejoicing. All faces shone with the radiance of the Holy LIGHT. I alone was living in a sea of agonizing doubt. I was fighting with my faith and my unfaithfulness. The joy of the Resurrection and the Holy LIGHT was {68} absent from my soul. My face was forced to express a bitter smile. I was constantly talking to myself and continually repeating: "People, simple and ignorant! If you only knew that inside the Holy Sepulchre there were a kantili and a candle, would you be joyful?"

Then at the doorway of the outer chamber appeared the Patriarch with the bundles of candles all aglow with the Holy LIGHT. The Latin and Armenian prelates each received their candles to pass out the LIGHT to their faithful. When the Orthodox prelate approached to receive his bundle of candles, he was carried on the shoulders of pilgrims into the Church of the Resurrection where everyone waited to light their tapers with the Holy FLAME. All the while, could be heard the chanting of the Easter hymn of victory, the conquest of LIFE over Death - Christ is risen! Christos Anesti! Truly He is risen!

The joy of the people was tremendous. With heavenly glee the bells of the Church proclaimed the arrival of the Divine LIGHT to all corners of the earth. The vibrant resounding of the bells declared the ONE and ONLY TRUTH of the Orthodox faith - the triumph of LIFE = CHRIST, over Death = the evil one.

Even though tremendous joy surrounded me, I continued to indulge in my muddy thoughts about the genuineness of the Holy LIGHT. The doubts I had gnawed at my soul.

'To assure you,' Fr. Mitrofanis told us, 'that I lived an {69} Easter without happiness, one that was miserable and one that I wish I had never experienced.'

However, something as an infinitesimal spark gave me a cunning sense of satisfaction. Since I was responsible for the Holy LIGHT preparations, I would be the first to enter the inner sanctuary to collect items not needed anymore. I must put them in their proper storage places for protection against profanation by those of other religions, by those weak in faith, and by those governed by misdoubt or envy.

To my surprise, there was something which changed my dark perplexed feelings. It dissolved the phantoms of doubt lurking in my head. The kantila was lit, and the candle causing me the most misgivings was just as I had left it.

It was precisely in the same spot as I had placed it. I questioned myself: "Why is the candle untouched? Why didn't it light? What was the candle needed for? What purpose did it serve and why did my elder order me to have it in the page of the Holy Prayers?"

Another question came to be added to the first. It contributed to the strengthening of my little happiness. It was the thought of the Armenian priest who followed closely every movement of the Patriarch. Wouldn't he see any pre-existing underhandedness?

An austere voice censured my restless soul and was repeating with severity.

"Those who believe do not doubt. Those who believe do not put to the test whatever is sacred and hallowed. {70}

Those who believe are not shaken by 'candles' and baseless suspicions. "Miracles are beyond explanation and should not be suspect, because it is impossible to investigate them. Investigation has no place in miracles. Miracles lie above natural laws. They are Heavenly. They are Godsent divine visitations. What is impossible with God, Fr. Mitrofanis? What is impossible? "The things that are impossible with man, are possible with God," acknowledged the Son of God, Christ Himself.

A second voice emerged with power to intercept whatever faith was surfacing in me. Everything is a lie and its echo was sounding horribly in the impenetrable part of my soul. Everything is a delusion Something unknown is taking place that you don't know about at this time. What is the 'candle' doing inside the Holy Sepulchre if there is a miracle? Or, what do you suppose the 'kantila' is doing there. That 'candle' that 'kantila', I was saying to myself. I must find out by every means to know why the 'candle' is needed, and what the 'Kantila' is for inside the Tomb of Christ. However, the first voice was returning more strongly.

"Didn't you see the 'candle' with your own eyes, Fr. Mitrofanis? How could it be lit without the slightest sign of carbon on the wick? Why do you doubt and disbelieve? Or do you want to accuse the Patriarch, the {71} prelates, and the priests of the Holy Sepulchre as being deceivers?"

How could that be possible when such a stringent and thorough search is made in the Sepulchre? What about the Armenian priest who would be extremely alert while inspecting for any item with which to start a flame, such as a lighter, matches or any frictional instruments? The Patriarch himself is put under an exacting bodily examination from head to toe, while every seam and fold in his vestments are under scrutiny as well as his footwear."

[All of these precautions are taken by the non-Orthodox in order to ensure the veracity of the

miracle. However, it is said that there is a questionable side underlying the reason for a scrupulous search. If any fraudulence is detected, this would give grounds to discredit the absolute authority of the Orthodox as the one and only true successor to Christ and His teachings. In such a case, the other faiths would have leverage to compel Orthodoxy to relinquish its authoritarian position as guardians of the sites related to our Lord's existence on earth].

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15. THE MOST DARING PLAN OF MY LIFE.

Now a new persistent impulse took hold of me. I must know, I must see what happens inside the closed Tomb of Christ. I was overcome with the urge to witness with my own eyes and at first hand. As another doubting {72} Thomas, I had to see for myself to learn what occurs to bring about the miracle of the LIGHT.

These last words of Fr. Mitrofanis fueled our agonizing suspense as to what he had in mind. His tottering faith and his very serious questions began to affect our own religious beliefs as well. He had to tell us more. We were in a dilemma to believe or not to believe. We were seeking to have our faith restored.

Fr. Mitrofanis noticed our distress when he saw how disheartened we were. "Don't despair. Only listen and glorify God. Remember that I was young, only 25 years old, when all of these things happened.

My faith, shaken as it was, about the Holy LIGHT, always remained alive in Christ. I firmly believed, in spite of doubts. In the depth of my soul calmness reigned. A heavenly grace seemed to hover over me constantly. But my passion to see with my own eyes inside the closed Tomb was not dismissed. It was something that I earnestly yearned to witness. I knew it was extremely difficult and humanly impossible, unless some unexpected circumstance allowed me to behold the miracle.

My thoughts and my anguish were seen by God. He realized how unabated my longing was. For this reason he granted me unexpected events. He permitted incidents to occur in order to strengthen my faith. He created conditions so that I could witness the miraculous phenomenon and eventually to preach His wonders. {73}

Then some outlandish thoughts began to germinate in my head.

Since I, as a guard, am responsible for the Holy Sepulchre, I could ask for special permission to remain inside the Holy Tomb. However, that would be impossible and unachievable. The regulations were very strict. It was, therefore, foolish even to dare to ask. He who would hear my absurd wish would dismiss me with severity.

Then, I must hide, inside the Holy Sepulchre. That seemed entirely impossible, since there is neither space nor a corner in which to conceal myself, and to avoid the scrutiny of the priest inspectors prior to the appearance of the Holy LIGHT.

Another tremendous obstacle would be my absence from my post. How could I be elsewhere at the critical moment? If there was an unexpected way to hide inside the Life-giving Tomb, my absence would betray my responsibility as guard. Just before the great event I am one of the last ones to leave the Tomb, and at the termination, I am the first to enter to accompany the Patriarch out.

With these thoughts I tormented myself day and night. My thoughts always remained the same, constant, and firm, unchanged with absolutely no relinquishment on my part.

I must see with my own eyes.

I must know what happens inside the closed Tomb, I must I must {74}

And these "I must", remained constantly unfulfilled. There was no way to appease them or to dismiss them. Only ONE knew about this yearning of mine, God who knows even how the hairs of our head are numbered.

Even though my desire was beyond reality and impossible to be fulfilled, I still believed. I kept saying, "God will not let me suffer in ignorance. He will solve my perplexity and will allow me to gain a first glimpse of the Holy Light."

16. THE UNEXPECTED EVENT.

Days went by and I could do nothing but indulge in the reverie of my wish. As I stood guard at the Holy Sepulchre, faithful in my duties, my heart ached about my misgivings regarding the Holy LIGHT. Wherever I saw extinguished candles of the pilgrims, then I remembered the thick 'candle' of the Holy Prayer Book. I truly suffered from my obsession with the momentous event.

Fr. Mitrofanis paused; he remained quiet for a few minutes. Immediately his eyes filled with joy as he felt revived by a surge of strength. His face glowed with grace. A wide smile appeared on his face. "Listen," he told us, "what the most gracious Lord held in store for me."

One day an unexpected incident changed my whole life. In the small dome of the Holy Sepulchre hung 43 kantilia. Something dreadful happened. By divine grace, {75} God granted that the rope holding one of the four lines of the golden kantilia broke. What a calamity! It greatly shocked everyone. There was tremendous disorder and utter confusion.

However after the falling of the kantilia, an empty space in my soul was filled. That unexpected event gave a solution to my agony. The most daring plan of my life was to be fulfilled. The ceaseless "I musts" were to be realized.

After obtaining something to climb on, I attempted to remove the faulty rope. And what did I discover! Beneath the dome, in one corner to the left was a small recession, an imperceptible niche. It was so small that it could hardly hold one person. My sudden thought was that if I could hide in this tiny space, all of my skepticism could be dissolved. This niche was unknown to all. It would afford me a vantage point to observe what occurs regarding the Holy LIGHT.

On the occasion of this revelation, I noticed something else very significant. Gazing at the impenetrable "sky" formed by the 43 kantilia, the whole space above the Holy Sepulchre, was covered with thick black soot. This blackness was formed from the continual burning of vigil lights and countless candles lit as humble offerings at the Tomb of Christ. This contributed to the thick coating of carbon in the small dome which turned out to be a blessed basis for my plan. It provided a means to help resolve {76} my quandary-either my faith to be restored fully, or at worst

Following this unexpected discovery I approached my geronda, Fr. Anatolios. After describing to him about the terrible accumulation of soot in the dome, I expressed my desire to remove the many layers of smut. I told him that it is impossible to comprehend the amount of dust and soot coating

the dome. This whole unacceptable condition remains invisible because of the kantilia. It is fearfully dangerous I added, because in the likelihood that a part of the soot becomes detached, it could fall on the Tomb. Now if this occurred during the time when there is no Divine Liturgy, fine. But what if it happened during the Liturgy? I added many other justifications, always, however, with the object to succeed in my plan. However, every time I mentioned my willingness to clean the dome, my geronda offered a firm denial.

"Never such an act," he said in a severe tone of voice. "No such one-sided operation. Those of other faiths, the Armenians, the Latins, and the Copts, will raise unexpected issues. They will demand rights and unreasonable requests which may result in unforeseen and indeterminable results."

At the refusal of my geronda, who was mainly responsible, I as his assistant, acquiesced. I bowed, I kissed his hand, and departed."

I departed, not with the intent to deviate from my plan, {77} but to return with more perseverance. My plea for the second time, for the same purpose, had as a result the same steadfast and immovable denial. My plan, in the first stage, was to remove the soot in the whole unseen part of the Holy Tomb. The second part of my plan, was to devise a scheme, to hide inside the Holy Sepulchre. I wanted to be sure, to see with my own eyes what happens regarding the legend of the miracle of the Holy LIGHT. To speak and to preach the truth, or to be numbered among those who disbelieve and who declare that everything is a trick, a mockery, a false story, and many other such things.

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17. THE FINAL STEP FOR THE SUCCESS OF MY PLAN.

After days of pleading with my geronda, Fr. Anatolios, he sent me away with his usual rejection. Finally I found a new way to succeed with my plan. It was a desperate step, very daring and dangerous, but very effective. You must keep in mind that the Divine Liturgy is celebrated on the sacred Tomb every day. The Holy Utensils (the paten disc, the chalice, the covers and other items) are placed on the marble slab that covers the Tomb. Therefore the Holy Sepulchre is used as a Table of Oblation, as an altar for the Holy Gifts. At all of the Divine Liturgies, the celebrant Hierarch or priest, is on his knees. {78}

This presented a favorable opportunity, I prepared in secrecy a piece of cloth, a canopy, so that it had the dimensions of the Sepulchre. I then placed special nails ready to receive this makeshift canopy with the proper small hooks. Afterwards I took soot from the dome and sprinkled it on the sides of the kantiles, so that at the slightest movement, it would come down. This soot would begin to fall on the celebrant priest during the preparation or the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.

My plan was aimed in such away so as to force my geronda to agree - that it was absolutely necessary to remove this black dust. Now he would be convinced and he would permit me to go ahead and clean the dome of the Holy Tomb. I, in the meantime, would prepare my hiding place in the niche so that I could see the Holy LIGHT miracle.

One day when everything was ready, the Orthodox priest entered to celebrate the Divine Liturgy. When he began to prepare for the Liturgy, by Divine grace my plan came into action. A slight movement of the kantilia was able to shake the black dust which fell on the marble Tomb.

The celebrant priest then began to protest and to blame who else, but me. He wanted to place the responsibility and his indignation on my shoulders, saying that I was accountable for such a mishap.

I, with calmness and apathy accepted the whole blame. I did not say anything. Immediately I approached as {79} though I knew nothing to see what had happened. As soon as he showed me the soot that was falling from the kantilia on the Holy Tomb, I remained skeptical for a moment. Then, I produced the canopy and placed it on the nails so that it hung under the kantilia and prevented more soot from falling on the altar.

I was talking to myself, saying, "You all are responsible, all of you, one after the other, because you didn't allow me to clean this black dust." In the meantime, the Liturgy of the Orthodox came to a close.

The Armenian priest arrived to celebrate his Liturgy, but I, in the meantime had removed the canopy. Now the 43 kantilia were free to allow soot to fall. Then it began again as if an invisible hand shook the kantilia and the black dust fell continually. The Armenian father, because of this condition, was forced to leave. He could not celebrate at all. The Latins underwent the same ordeal. In the meantime these events became common news to all. After the other faiths were convinced that it was difficult to celebrate a Divine Liturgy, they departed. By the next day precise decisions were formulated. All of them, the Orthodox, the Armenians, the Latins, and the Copts, resolved that the Holy Sepulchre must be cleaned. My joy was unimaginable. My plan was taking substance. Its execution was certain. My geronda called me, and said, "You were right. However, it was not easy for me to take the initiative to have you clean the dome. You know {80} very well, that the other faiths have rights and privileges as well. It was not easy for us to decide alone. Now that all are convinced that there is a need to clean the space, go ahead and proceed with your work."

I made my prostrate, I thanked him, I kissed his hand and I left.

How overjoyed I was, to say the least. The success of my plan was beyond belief. Without any delay I began my Herculean task.

The soot was packed in thick layers as in an old, never-cleaned chimney. The whole dome of the Tomb was lost in this pitch black grime. One only had to realize that for more than 150 years no hand had touched or attempted to remove the smudge. After superhuman personal attempt and the great labor that I exerted, a great unexpected surprise was awaiting me. From the depth of that soot, underneath the black dust, there was a most beautiful Byzantine mosaic icon, a rare work of art, of the Resurrected Christ with two Heavenly Angels in pure white garments sitting at the Tomb. There with them were the Myrrh-bearing Women, Mary Magdalene, Mary, the mother of James and Salome and the Most-holy Mother of the Lord. A host of angels filled in the background of this unique masterpiece. The arrangement of the stones of every hue and shade of color conveyed an especially moving and breath-taking scene. However, most touching was the fact that this holy work of art was {81} located at the very spot where the Divine events occurred.

After my toilsome work was completed, the visits began again. Each person who entered the Tomb was seized with awe and joy. The cleanliness of the space and the glittering mosaic icon of the Resurrection, filled every visitor with admiration and enthusiasm. At the same time, I was being congratulated by everyone.

My geronda, Fr. Anatolios, was feeling a special satisfaction with my ability to rid the Tomb of such a quantity of grime. He had no idea of what I had in store for the near future, the coming Easter. He did not know that during the time of the cleaning of the Tomb, I laid out in exact details

a foolhardy scheme which remained to be executed.

Of all the visitors, immense satisfaction was expressed in the person of the Patriarch. He asked for my presence, and he honored me, in recognition of my efforts, with a medal of the Patriarchate. It was truly a rare gesture, because this religious token depicting Saints Constantine and Helen was given only on very special occasions. This decoration of the year 1926, exhilarated me. It reinforced my strength for difficult duties which lay ahead.

Days and weeks went by and finally the months paraded past me until the Great Lent of 1926 arrived. My plan, regardless of how dangerous and foolhardy it was, must be executed at all costs with secrecy and every precaution. There was, however, a tremendous obstacle, {82} my absence. How was it possible for me not to be present on Holy Saturday? Who would prepare the whole proceedings for the ceremony? Naturally there was my geronda, Fr. Anatolios. However, from the day that I undertook duties as guard of the Tomb, he withdrew and undertook duties in another place from which he could not depart easily. How could he leave his own mission, and take over my duties?

"If, however," I was saying to myself, "something unexpected happened; if, during these days I happened to be sick; if, I was not able to move and to leave the hospital or my cell; if, it was impossible for me to serve during the ceremony of the Holy LIGHT, for whatever serious reason, what would he do? Would he not offer to fill the created vacancy and to undertake my duties?"

These various thoughts, one after the other, were tormenting me fearfully. My plan must be executed. The niche was ready and had the possibility to protect me and to keep me completely out of sight. The only thing that remained was to contrive a plausible reason for my absence during Holy Saturday. My geronda must know. But I needed a serious excuse. I had a few thoughts. I studied improbable circumstances, that seemed to me somehow justified, and finally I approached my geronda with great fear and hesitation.

"Holy father," I told him, "I received a letter from Greece, informing me that during Holy Week, a relative {83} of mine, a Colonel, will visit me. He will stay a few days and will leave on Holy Saturday. He put me in a very difficult position with a plea. He asked me to help him with his departure because he knows neither the language nor the places here. I promise you that during the service of the Holy LIGHT, at least toward the end, I will be present. I will, however, be absent on Holy Saturday morning until that time. May I have your blessing, Holy father?"

When he heard my request, he got up from his chair and with unprecedented austerity told me: "You always ask the most difficult and inappropriate requests. On the day of Holy Saturday we are literally drowning in tasks and responsibilities and you demand to be absent? The only thing I ask of you, is that you not repeat what you're saying to me now."

His words were strict. The tone of his voice did not allow for any further discussion. With this denial, I departed. The next day, however, I returned with great hesitation. During the course of our discussion that revolved around different topics, I repeated my plea. The answer was a steadfast refusal. But this topic was repeated every day until the end of Great Lent. Then my pleas began to be accompanied by tears, and my tears, by fervent prayers. I was praying to God to enlighten my geronda to give me permission to be absent.

In my perseverance and my continual prayers, I won. Unexpectedly, instead of his denial he told me, "Do you {84} promise that during the time of the Holy LIGHT you will be present?"

"Yes!" I answered him with certainty, since I was sure of this. "Then, go, with my blessing. God be

with you."

What could I add to the reply of my geronda? My feelings? My happiness? My agony? The fear that conquered me? What? Because after this decision, the) execution of my final plan was to commence.

It was during these days, the beginning of Holy Week when multitudes of pilgrims began to fill the Holy City, While all was ready in my feverish mind, agitation in my heart increased and the throbbing in my whole body reached an unbearable point. The final phase of my plan still remained without solution. How, and with what means would I climb to the niche without being seen? Naturally, I would use a ladder of sorts. However, afterwards, how would this ladder be removed? It was not possible for me to climb up and at the same time to remove it. The difficulty would be solved only if someone would take the ladder after I climbed up into my hiding place. Nevertheless, whoever it was, he would know that I remained in the Holy Sepulchre. He would know that someone was hidden in the space that was strictly forbidden. The result would be dreadful. Whether wittingly or unwittingly, he would reveal my whereabouts. Immediately it would be known to those in charge. There would be unforeseen consequences. Orthodoxy would suffer embarrassment in the eyes of {85} other faiths. Duplicity would crumble people's trust in their beliefs. If all failed, I would remain chained to haunting questions and doubts in whatever concerned the Holy LIGHT and my faith.

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18. THE UNEXPECTED SOLUTION TO THE DILEMMA.

With all of these thoughts I was tempted to drop my whole plan because the risks loomed large to defeat my goal. In my worst moment of desperation a solution came to mind. I remembered a good-hearted, kind, and naive person. It would be impossible for him ever to conceive of my plans, much more, to imagine the most daring and skillful move of my life. Therefore, I decided to approach him.

That person was the doorkeeper of the Holy Church of the Resurrection who, every day with the use of a ladder opened the very high door of the Holy Church in the morning and closed it at night. He was Fr. Nikandros, faithful in his duty, who enjoyed respect and veneration from others. He was characterized by obedience and exemplary humility. This simple monk was well-loved, always willing, and he never refused to serve anyone. I approached him, and calmly, with a natural indifference I said to him,

"Fr. Nikandros, I need to ask a favor of you. At about midnight after the services of Good Friday, would you please help me with your ladder so that I can inspect the {86} kantilia of the Holy Sepulchre? I also need to be sure of the kantilia at the entrance of the Holy Stone. Since I am responsible, I want to avert any oversight during the service of the Holy LIGHT.

I have a feeling that something may not be as it should, and I want to check all of the kantilia after I climb the ladder. It is not necessary for you to wait until I finish. You will take the ladder and leave. After I check everything, it will be easy for me to come down. I have a way. Don't worry."

I knew that with a careful jump, I could descend from the niche easily. At the momentous appearance of the long-awaited-for Holy LIGHT, there would be a joyful noise and confusion. People would be caught up in their jubilation and elation at seeing the welcome LIGHT. No one would notice me, and without any difficulty I could take my proper place in the ceremony. If all

went well, I would achieve my mission without disturbance and without anyone knowing of my audacity.

Fr. Nikandros, without any sign of suspicion of what I was about to do, agreed to my request.

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19. I SAW THE HOLY LIGHT.

It was exactly 12:30 after midnight of Good Friday towards Holy Saturday of the year 1926. My necessities consisted of a flashlight and a small container of water, {87} barely enough to quench my thirst in the long hours of confinement in the niche. My plan, I was sure, would be crowned with success. My initial self-confidence gradually changed to timidity, but now determination predominated.

When all was ready, I called Fr. Nikandros, who without delay brought the ladder. I secured it, climbed up, and said to him: "Take with you the ladder. As soon as I finish I will come down." And that's how it was. I am not in a position, nor do I have the strength to describe to you my feelings and the psychological state in which I found myself. The hours I lived in this unforgettable situation, full of fear and awe, are indescribable.

[Black and white picture](#)

The Great Miracle of the Centuries

In the beginning cold sweat bathed me from head to toe. My whole body trembled and I began to shiver. I felt as one who was about to be executed. Then, I experienced an exceedingly great fear, such as I had never felt before. Even until today I still seek to find the reason for that panic. I can give no explanation. My sense of helplessness and bewilderment was unprecedented. At the same time inside me, a strong intense, threatening voice of censure, constantly threw me into confusion. "Who else dared something *The Greatest Miracle of the Centuries* {88} similar in the passing of the centuries of Christianity? Ho' could you decide upon this daring act? If, for any reason you are caught, what will you do? What justification will you give? What excuse will you dare to voice? What, Fr. Mitrofanis?"

Despite these horrible thoughts that terrified me, my perseverance did not desist. I must resolve my doubts. Why should I live every day with questions and misgivings? For my own satisfaction I must verify whatever happens, whether it is called a miracle or a delusion, I needed to know so that I could live the rest of my life in peace and trust. I must have weakened, however, because soon my strong persistence was on the wane and repentance was setting in.

I began to repent for the things I had done up to that moment. I felt someone forcefully telling me, "Come down quickly! Why did you entangle yourself in such a predicament? You still have time. In a little while the Orthodox Divine Liturgy will begin. It will end at 4 o'clock in the morning. Immediately following, the Armenians will come, and their service will last as long as ours. You will be compelled to be still continuously silent, composed, and calm. Will you last? And if not, then what? After the Armenians, the Latins will follow. Until 6:15 in the morning when they finish their Liturgy, you will not be able to make a move or a sound. What if something annoys your throat, and you are forced to {89} cough? What then? Well? Woe to you and three times woe to you. What will become of you, Fr. Mitrofanis?"

I began to deplore myself for my hasty and foolhardy decision. Continuously I was upbraiding myself and repeatedly kept saying: "The whole world believes. Who are you not to believe? Think of the consequences if you are discovered. In what a dreadful and difficult position you will find yourself then!"

While all of these thoughts, pricked my conscience, my eyes were glued to my watch. The minutes seemed as days and the hours seemed to last for years. The hour hand, as if in revenge for my rashness, refused to move.

Finally, it was two o'clock after midnight towards Holy Saturday, when the Orthodox priest came to the Holy Sepulchre to commence the Divine Liturgy. After the Orthodox worship, at exactly 4:00 in the morning, the Armenian priest came and immediately began his Liturgy.

The excruciating fatigue of being in a cramped position compounded by protracted wakefulness affected my hearing. Every sound reverberated through the whole of my feverish throbbing body. The taxing strain and exhaustion of the previous days combined with unwavering weariness and monotony brought on an unimaginable dizziness. Finally the Armenian service ended and the Latins arrived. To keep myself alert and awake I followed and observed closely whatever occurred during the duration of each Liturgy. I saw the unleavened wafers, thin round {90} pieces, used as the Body of Christ, instead of the bread that the Orthodox use. With abated breath I sat patiently. The need to cough was unnecessary since I was in good health, but my mouth was dry from agony. Only from time to time I put a little water to my lips to cool and wet them.

At 6:15, the morning hour of Holy Saturday, the last of the Latins departed and the Holy Sepulchre was given over to my geronda, Fr. Anatolios.

Imagine what an unbearable shock he would have had if he had known that I was within reach of him. Truly, what would have happened? What a dreadful reaction could result if he knew that my pleas and my tears were all a monstrous lie, a lie that I was forced to resort to in order to pacify my dubiousness!

Immediately, preparations were begun, which under different circumstances I would have been the one to bring to completion. Fr. Anatolios, put out one after the other the 43 vigil lights of the Holy Sepulchre. Then, he went to the entrance of the Tomb where the Holy Stone was. There he occupied himself to have the sealing wax ready.

There was no delay in this preparation, because at 11 o'clock, the search was to be made for any instrument capable of igniting. Immediately after, the doors of the Tomb would be sealed. At exactly 12 o'clock noon the Holy Sepulchre would be opened. Every Holy Saturday, this routine was executed with attention to every detail. I was aware of all the movements. At 11 o'clock when {91} the Tomb was sealed, I was in total darkness. I lit the flashlight that I had with me and I saw on the Tomb the holy kantila. I saw it, awaiting an invisible hand to give it LIGHT. Beside it, I saw the Prayer Book closed, except for a thick candle between some pages which would allow easy access to the special supplications. I turned off the flashlight. My agony reached its climax. I prayed to Christ.

"My Lord, You know the reasons for my decision to be in this unlikely predicament. All emanated by doubts of one shaken and weak in his faith. I have imitated your chosen and beloved Thomas. He didn't want to believe when the other disciples assured him of your Resurrection. Instead he wanted to see for himself and to touch your wounds and then to be convinced.

I, much weaker than your doubting Thomas, ask to see with my own eyes what takes place

regarding the Holy LIGHT. My faith such as it is, You know, Lord. My love does not escape Your omniscience. My Lord, and My God, make me worthy to see what will happen so that faith will replace faithlessness. Besides, even Your disciples asked You for reassurance even though they witnessed innumerable miracles, 'Increase our faith' (Luke 17:5), they said."

When I finished my prayer, I again turned on the flashlight to see the Holy Tomb. The light fell precisely on the candle. "Oh, that candle, I said. "What is this candle doing there?" In a moment, I interrupted my {92} monologue, because I noticed the door of the Holy Sepulchre opening. With a quick glance I saw it was exactly 12 o' clock noon. Agony began to overcome me, and my heart multiplied its beats so rapidly that I thought it would jump out of my chest. I felt a tightening pressure about me. I was ready to faint. I tried to control myself with all my strength and to give courage to my quaking body. The sound of footsteps inside the first chamber of the Holy Stone startled me. For a brief moment, I noticed the silhouette of the Patriarch, who bent down in order to enter the space of the Life-giving Tomb.

My excitement had reached a fearful peak; Yet I was so immersed in an endless silence that I could hardly hear my own breath. Suddenly came the sound of a soft whistling. It was similar to a fine breeze of wind. And immediately, an unforgettable sight, a blue LIGHT filled the entire Tomb. That blue LIGHT, was going round and round exactly as a strong whirlwind, whose force uproots the tallest trees, grasps them, and carries them off. The restless blue LIGHT gyrated about with lightning speed and then the movements slowed down.

Within that LIGHT I saw very clearly the Patriarch. Drops of perspiration trickled down his face. As he was kneeling, he placed his finger at the opening in the Holy Book where the 'candle' was. In the meantime, he placed on the Tomb four bundles, each containing 33 candles. When the mysterious LIGHT changed to a steady glow {93} the Patriarch opened to the 'candle' page and he began to read the prayers.

The then somewhat calm blue LIGHT, began again an uneasy movement. It was an unimaginable and indescribable whirling, stronger than the first. Immediately it began to change into an all-white LIGHT, as at the Transfiguration of Christ (Mathew 17:2). Gradually the all white LIGHT began to take the form of a disc, brilliant as the sun, and stopped motionless precisely over the head of the Patriarch. I saw the Patriarch take in his hands the bundles of candles. He raised them and waited. He was awaiting the arrival of the elusive LIGHT from God. As he raised his hands slowly, not quite reaching the height of his head, instantaneously as if he were touching a lighted furnace, the Holy Kantila and the four bundles of candles lit. In an instant that bright disc vanished before me.

My eyes filled with tears. I felt shivers in my spine while my whole body was burning. I had the feeling that untamed flames of an incandescent furnace enveloped me. My entire body was soaked in perspiration, while my mind, heart, and soul seemed paralyzed at the heavenly revelation of the Holy LIGHT.

The Patriarch, deeply touched, and in a state of bliss, departed. Out of reverence for the Holy space of the Tomb, he bent his head low and backed out to enter the chamber of the Holy Stone. In his hands were the bundles {94} of candles lit by the flames of the Divine LIGHT. Here was evidence of Grace in its glory!

Now was the time for the first bundle of candles to be presented to the Orthodox prelate. Out of joy, he was carried on the shoulders of the faithful to transport the LIGHT to the Church of the Resurrection. From his hand the LIGHT would be passed out to all of the people who clamored to have their tapers lit by the Holy FLAME.

The Armenian, the Latin, and the Coptic prelates each received their bundles of burning candles, and they in turn, distributed the Holy FLAME to their followers.

The bells of the Holy Church of the Resurrection began to ring joyfully while all of the people, elated and jubilant, began to sing with fervor, hymns of praises and gratitude to the Resurrected Christ.

The pealing of the bells sounding as trumpets of Heaven, proclaimed to the faithful the message of the Resurrection "that the Lord is truly risen!"

During that period of high glee and in the excitement of the enthusiastic people, an opportunity was given to me. Without losing any time and after a quick glance, I jumped from the niche down into the space of the Holy Tomb. Immediately I took the Holy kantila and the Holy Book for which I was responsible as well as the thick "candle" which was used only as a marker for the page of the prayers. In a moment I appeared before my geronda, Fr. Anatolios. He, astonished by my unexpected presence, asked me: {95} "How did you get here, Fr. Mitrofanis?" "Didn't you see me, my geronda? I was next to you. I was right by your side. I promised you that I would be here on time and here I am!"

Now, my friends, if you can put yourself in my place, and if you can perceive the gamut of sensations which pierced my soul, then let me compare two Easters for you, the one of 1925, and that of 1926. As much sadness as I felt on the Easter of the previous year, that is how much more happiness was mine this present Easter. As shakable as was my faith the last Holy Saturday, that much more fervent and strong, it was this Easter. Wherever my eyes turned toward whatever direction, inside and outside the Church of the Resurrection, everywhere I saw before me the Heavenly Blue LIGHT. I saw it restless and vibrant with an unbelievable velocity.

Everywhere I heard its faint but penetrating whistling, and felt its delicate cool breath touching me. Its Heavenly grace overshadowed me. The visitation of the Holy Spirit filled me, although I felt so unworthy.

Immediately my whole being was transported to the upper room of Zion, there where the disciples were gathered and waiting for the gift from above of the Holy Spirit.

The awe that seized me filled my soul with an inexpressible joy and kept my mind on the Divine Event. Through my imagination I followed the Heavenly vision. Continually I saw the restless presence of the mysterious {96} and ultramundane blue LIGHT filling the Holy Tomb with its unique brightness, illuminating the entire surroundings. I saw its all-white transformation and its reshaping into a bright disc of a summer day.

Again I returned to the upper room of the disciples. I brought to mind the infinite quietness and their waiting. Suddenly I heard "the breath and the sound from heaven" (Acts 2:2).

Yes, the upper room was transformed into a place for the descent of the Holy Spirit. To me, the Holy Tomb replaced the upper room. There, "in the shape of fiery tongues," here, in Holy LIGHT. There, to the disciples, here, to the multitude of the faithful, its grace was distributed.

A great length of time passed. I didn't, however, have the power or the inclination to dismiss from my mind the Heavenly vision. The wondrous joy would not depart from my soul. Continually I repeated "Glory be to God." At times, as I thought of the forbearance of God, with shame and regret I admonished myself for my doubts and for my persistence to witness in order to believe. It was in His infinite Love that He granted to me whatever I wanted and He satisfied the longing in

my soul.

Others too have seen the Holy LIGHT, on the hallowed day of Holy Saturday, not, however, in the same way. Each one, according to the degree of his faith is made worthy of this vision. Some see the Holy LIGHT as a flash of light similar to lightning. Other, see the {97} Holy Tomb surrounded by flames. Again, others see a small LIGHT, as that of a bright star.

There are also non-believers who go during Holy Saturday to the Church of the Resurrection and they demand to see the Holy LIGHT. These naive people do not comprehend that everything depends on faith. Since they do not believe, they misinterpret and speak demeaningly of all that occurs. This reflects the emptiness in their souls. All that they want to do, is to argue with those who do believe.

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20. MY GUILTY CONSCIENCE AND MY CONFESSION.

One would think, Fr. Mitrofanis continued, that the same joy and the same spiritual feelings would follow me forever. I thought that life would go on as usual, without my mentioning to anyone what I did and what I beheld. After several days however, my joy was displaced by grief and an unceasing remorse. Eventually I was afflicted with a tenacious melancholy which seemed to battle against me and to extinguish my sublime joy. Little by little these opposing feelings began to arouse in me a guilty conscience, so strong, that I was not able to dismiss them and to find some degree of serenity.

What have I done, I was saying to myself. What did I do so thoughtlessly? How could I dare to do something so strictly forbidden as to hide in the chapel of the Holy {98} Sepulchre? What about all the lies that I used in order to succeed with my plan? Isn't this another fearful sin?

"Yes, a fearful sin," a strange voice was heard to echo in my whole being.

And what must I do?

"You must go to confession," the voice repeated.! "You must go to confession and you must go to the Patriarch himself."

Immediately I made a firm decision. However, I was seized by fear and it stopped me from my resolve.

With these feelings of my inner personal struggle, the joy was completely gone from me. Tears flowed freely and I was crying all of the time. For forty days I was fighting to conquer the fear and consternation tormenting me. Every day I would approach the door of the Patriarch, ready to knock. I knew that I must advance toward my repentance, but dread and palpitations always forced me back. This fear of mine was so powerful and unyielding that it prevented me from acting on my decision.

My fellow monks noticed me. They were worried. The gloomy look on my face and the continuous tears betrayed me. Everyone wanted to know what was the matter. They approached me in order to learn the reason for my distress. When they heard that something serious had happened to me, they advised me to go for confession. I told them that I must go to the Patriarch. They suggested to me a most capable father confessor, but I was adamant about confessing to the Holy Patriarch. {99}

It wasn't long before my morbid condition became known to the Patriarch. When he heard from other people that I wanted to visit him, immediately he sent word that he would receive me. Now only determination and courage remained to bolster me for the encounter.

An end must be given to my prolonged anguish. For this reason, without delay, I set out to visit the Holy Father.

Black and white picture

I approached the Patriarchal office slowly and with great hesitation. Terror seized me. I didn't know what I was going to face. My heart began to beat furiously. My knees shook. Finally I raised my hand to knock at the door and timidly, to say the least, I entered. By now the need to retreat had diminished and I felt that at this time I could fulfill a duty which my conscience had imposed upon me. As soon as I faced the Holy Geronda, I fell on my knees and began to cry, so much that I was unable to speak. "Come closer, my child," I heard the Patriarch telling me. "Why so many tears? Did you kill anyone? Come closer. Confess! on and sincere {100} repentance absolve everything. Christ was crucified to enable everyone, just and unjust, to repent for their sins and to enter His Kingdom. Confession is a great Sacrament "

When I heard these comforting words, "that confession and sincere repentance forgive everything" I was encouraged. The weight pressing on my soul had gone, and soon I was able to say, "A thousand times preferable, Holy Geronda, to have killed someone than what I have done."

When the Patriarch heard these words, he asked in amazement and yet with solicitude, "WHAT IS THE HOLY FIRE then, my child, this thing you have done and you create in me such suspense? WHAT IS THE HOLY FIRE? Confess so that your conscience may be relieved and your soul may be freed from the pain of guilt."

My Holy Geronda, I laid out a dangerous and forbidden plan. The work that I did, and the lies which I uttered in order to succeed were tremendous. I lived weeks and days in agony and fear. After I succeeded and overcame many obstacles, I hid inside the Holy Sepulchre. No one, absolutely no one, knew about this.

Upon hearing my confession, the Patriarch was so astonished that his face changed color and his eyes expressed a dreadful uneasiness. He got up from his chair. With his hands raised, and with a voice of fear, he exclaimed, "How did you dare such an act, my child?" My tremulous voice replied, "In order to pacify my {101} misgivings and to dismiss from my soul my unfaithfulness, Holy Father; I had to see for myself the genuineness of the Holy LIGHT. I wanted to verify for myself about the spontaneous appearance of the Divine LIGHT."

Although I must have had a frightened look on my face, I felt calm and my answer hopefully was convincing. No expression of desperation was evident on my part.

The Holy Geronda, recovering from the unexpected and shocking revelation, soon became calm himself. He pulled up his chair and sat again.

An analogy arises from this whole scene. Just as a stormy sea arouses fright and despair in those who sail, so did I feel when I had my encounter with the Holy Geronda. However, when the storm subsides and tranquil waters prevail, so it was when the Patriarch regained his composure. With gentle fatherly affection, and great perplexity as well, he asked me, "How were you able to hide inside the Holy Sepulchre, since there is no space to hold anything?"

"Holy Father, I succeeded by hiding in a niche which I discovered. Do you remember how much confusion and difficulty there was with the need of the immediate cleaning of the Holy Tomb? I undertook this unimaginably difficult task. As I made every endeavor to bring this work to completion, I discovered a tiny space in a corner under the dome. With great difficulty it could hide a small person. Lying on one side with great effort not to fall, I remained there hidden from midnight of Holy Friday. I had with me a little water and a small {102} flashlight which I used from time to time. I wanted to know why the candle that was in the page of the Holy book was needed.

At a certain time, without realizing it, and while I was shaking with fear, accidentally I touched the button of the flashlight, and suddenly there was an instantaneous illumination of the Holy Sepulchre. You noticed it, I know."

"Yes, my child, Yes! I was aware of it and fear overtook me. In fact I mentioned this incident to the Holy Synod during its meeting."

"For this reason, Holy Geronda, and for all the other things that I have done I had to have confession. I couldn't stand the guilt of my conscience."

"After that, what did you see, my child?" the Holy One asked me.

"Holy Geronda, I saw the Holy LIGHT." I described to him in great detail, all that I beheld. The Patriarch continually was making the sign of the cross and was glorifying God. With tears in his eyes he told me.

"I saw absolutely nothing, my child. And what I am going to entrust to you now, you will never repeat to anyone until I die.

When, by the grace of God, I am made worthy to receive the Holy LIGHT from the Tomb of the Resurrected Christ, the following things happen to me.

When my conscience is calm and nothing occupies my thoughts, nothing that has the power to overshadow my tranquility and my devotion to God, an inexpressible joy {103} seizes me. As soon as I enter the Holy Tomb, I read a few lines from the Prayer Book. When I raise the bundles of candles for the invocation for the LIGHT, then by the Grace of God, the kantili, as well as the candles are lit.

But, if the calmness of my soul does not accompany me and I do not have the proper preparation and devotion to God, I do not have that incredible joy. Then as soon as I bend down to enter the Holy Tomb, I see the kantila already lit, and from it, I light the candles.

Go, therefore, my child, with my blessing. May God who made you worthy to see the Holy LIGHT be with you always."

Following my confession I received the blessing. I kissed with much humility the holy hand of the Patriarch and left. Since then, I have been full of peace and calm. From that day on I continued with steadfast faith and devotion my duties. Every day I thanked and glorified God.

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21. THE SECOND PURPOSELESS REPETITION OF MY ACT.

Time passed and the years succeeded one after the other. After my confession the vision of the Holy LIGHT remained unaltered in my mind and heart. No one knew my secret, except the Holy Patriarch. The Sacrament of Confession is inviolate, so, there was no possible way that it would be revealed. {104}

The following year, 1927, my geronda Fr. Anatolios showed symptoms of fatigue and threatening signs of old age. However, he continued to maintain his genial, gentle, and tranquil manner. His serenity stemmed from his sense of humility in all of his endeavors and offerings in the Holy Land for the glory of God and the Orthodox faith.

The little strength he had, gradually abandoned him, and in a few days he departed to the Lord, to HIM, who gives to everyone according to his deeds.

Life went on as usual. Each day I pursued my tasks with joy and enthusiasm. Every Easter I was filled with the glory and the grace of the Resurrection. Yet I was not totally satisfied. I seemed to be seeking the blessing of the Holy LIGHT in the way that I had experienced it through the Divine dispensation on Holy Saturday of the year 1926. As that day arrived each year, I relived the mysterious phenomenon as I had witnessed it then. With longing I sought to behold it again even the smallest ray of what had appeared to me at that time. The only thing I could see now was the imparting of the Holy LIGHT by the prelates to the thousands of pilgrims. I missed the first-hand experience in the forbidden sanctity of the Holy Sepulchre.

I must admit that many events did grant me happiness, particularly the one in which the Orthodox Hierarch with the Holy LIGHT was carried on the shoulders of the faithful to the Church of the Resurrection. When all had {105}

[Black and white photo](#)

The Holy Sepulchre

{106}

their tapers lit, then young Arab Christians from Bethlehem added to the fervent gladness. With a custom preserved from generation to generation, this is what they did:

Several youths from the group stood on the shoulders of each other and formed a pyramid. Rejoicing crowds followed this formation, chanting to the accompaniment of a special whistling, which proclaimed this verse:

Here is the LIGHT,

Here is the TRUTH,

And here is LIFE evermore!

All continued with an exuberant enthusiasm to recite paeans for the Holy LIGHT. These age-old praises are perpetuated up to the present time. In this ocean of joy could be heard the refrain at the end of each verse:

Christ is ours -

He was born in our village - Bethlehem

The happenings and the sounds all around revived soul-stirring memories in me. The appearance of the Holy LIGHT brought into sharp focus what I did and what I saw in the year of 1926 when I was hidden in the niche over the Holy Sepulchre.

The crowds of people chanting and the bells resounding throughout the land released a gamut of my innermost feelings. Above all I never ceased to offer my thanksgivings - Glory be to God, glory be to God - for all of the blessings bestowed upon me so generously.

One would think that I should be grateful and satisfied, {107} but five years later, I longed to see at first-hand the Divine LIGHT once again.

The general operation and supervision of the service of the Holy LIGHT were in my hands. I decided to lay out the same plan, and in the year 1931, I hid again in the niche, in order to see once more the advent of the Holy LIGHT.

Everything was done in complete secrecy and with absolute success. When that holy moment came and the Patriarch entered the Holy Tomb, for some reason I suffered a lapse of vision. When I was able to see again to continue my vigilant attendance, I saw the Holy Kantila lit and the candles aglow in the hands of the Patriarch.

I said to myself, "You ask for far too much, Fr. Mitrofanis. God is not one to tempt with wishes, whims, and doubts. He granted to you more than you deserved when you were seeking and searching to alleviate your unfaithfulness. When doubt set up a golden icon in your soul, HE did not abandon you. He proved to you that He is near you and He follows you. If you seek to enjoy that same blessedness, strive and struggle to win His Heavenly Kingdom. There, you will see with your faith the Heavenly grace of the LIGHT. The select of the Kingdom of Heaven will see God Himself face to face. Where faith presides all will see the source of the Holy LIGHT.

In this world we must believe that through faith, you will live, Fr. Mitrofanis, through faith you will move and through faith you will have your being. Therefore, advance {108} with no more other dangerous and purposeless trials."

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22. ANOTHER EYEWITNESS NARRATES.

Fr. Mitrofanis continued, "I lived with these thoughts and decisions until this very moment that I am speaking to you. As unworthy as I was, yet God's Grace and forbearance allowed me the ultimate experience on this earth. This I locked in my soul without anyone being a participant. The Sacrament of Confession sealed the secret and I kept it from 1926 until 1938, the year when Patriarch Damianos passed away to the Lord. I felt then a freedom to express myself. I was free from the bonds of confession because the Holy Geronda had told me: "What I am going to entrust to you now, you will never repeat to anyone, until I die".

Then a new era began for me. Whenever I was given the opportunity and the thought that I could impart the faith in my listeners, I revealed whatever God allowed me to see.

Every day people came to me who had the same skepticism and uncertainties as I had had. Anything seemingly veiled or difficult to define, generates questions and longings for spiritual support. Mysteries (Sacraments) of the Church are concerned with the Divine, and ultimately through profound faith, union with God. Finally humility and reverence invite the Grace of God to

enlighten and to sweep away the dark clouds of {109} vacillation. There are, however, brothers of Thomas who "must see in order to believe."

"One such case," Fr. Mitrofanis continued, "appeared again. There was an Abyssinian monk who lived in the Holy Land. His name is unknown to me but his face and his figure will remain unforgettable in my mind. For thirty years he was tormented by the mystery of the Holy LIGHT. He had a deep yearning to see what took place during the service on Holy Saturday. He pleaded and prayed to God. He laid out daring plans, but they always remained unrealized. It was no simple matter to get past the vigilant eyes of guards and those responsible for the Tomb. Thus he resigned himself to his unfulfilled desire to witness the miracle."

In 1960, Bishop Athenagoras, as trustee of the Patriarch, was to officiate at the Holy LIGHT ceremony. By divine intervention, unknown as to how, the Abyssinian monk took advantage of an opportunity of some confusion, and entered without being noticed and remained motionless inside the small room of the Holy Stone. The dark color of his skin made him invisible and he became one with the dark surroundings. Before he realized it, he was locked inside when the Tomb was sealed. He crouched himself in a corner and remained very still. Not one of the inspectors noticed his presence. After the Orthodox prelate received his bundle of lit candles, the Patriarch was ready to give bundles of candles to the Latin and Armenian {110} prelates. Only then was the unlawful incognito noticed.

The outrage of these prelates was unprecedented. They feared for their privileges. They began to hit the unfortunate Abyssinian monk, but he remained calm during this sudden attack. He was as a martyr who, while bleeding and in pain, maintained a strange quietness.

"Hit me," he said, "as much as you want! Hang me. Kill me. Cut me in pieces. I have been granted the beatitude, which for thirty years I was seeking with all my heart. Yes, I saw the Patriarch surrounded by a Divine LIGHT, brilliant in its resplendence. I saw the whole Tomb aglow. Now I am in bliss. If I die this moment, I will die in a sea of heavenly joy and divine blessing."

After this acknowledgement, the courageous stand, and the unfailing faith of the Abyssinian monk, the indignant protectors of their prerogatives stopped their attack. They paid no attention to the presence and the purpose of the monk. Nothing moved their souls, not even the fiery faith of this devout ascetic.

Only one thing concerned them, the loss of the latitude of their rights, within the boundaries of the Holy Sepulchre.

23. THE MARTYR, GUARD OF THE HOLY LANDS. *A NEW MARTYR.*

Many people, Father Mitrofanis added, do not know either the toils or the sacrifices that are made for the guarding of sacred places in the Holy Land. They hear {111} about the Holy Sepulchre only. They do not know how this and other sites are guarded and how they are preserved. A few hundredths of an inch constitute boundaries that unimaginable efforts are made by the heretics to force and to occupy them. A slight indifference on behalf of the guard, or an insignificant oversight are sufficient for other faiths to subjugate space in order to acquire rights, to demand privileges, and finally to control without regard for the Orthodox predecessors.

It must be made clear that throughout the Holy Land, the other faiths, i.e., non-Orthodox Christians (Armenians, Latins, Coptics, and Protestants, as well) have their own separate property rights over their respective shrines, churches, chapels, monasteries, and retreats. In addition, there are mosques

with their minarets for the Moslems, and synagogues for the Jews. No one interferes with their authority over these.

The constant rivalry between the Orthodox and the heretics should not exist. Instead, there should be respect and regard for the infallible precedence of the Orthodox, who as heirs to Christ and His Holy Apostolic Church, have kept the teachings inviolate for 2000 years.

The martyrs of Orthodoxy and the vigilant guards have made it possible for people of all faiths and beliefs to visit and to worship in the Holy Land. The Holy Orders in the spirit of service, with zeal and ardor, safeguard and maintain the sanctity of all the consecrated shrines, {112} memorials, relics, artifacts and anything that invites veneration. The least that is owed to them is peace, good will, and non-interference.

The service of the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre of Jerusalem is incalculable, especially lately with the formation of the Hebrew nation and the hostile stand against Greece. The threats, Father Mitrofanis continued, the anonymous telephone calls, with the purpose to frighten the monks, have multiplied in order for the Orthodox to leave. The motive is for the holy places to be abandoned so that some can be converted into hotels and others to become tourist attractions manned by paid state employees with no regard for the spiritual.

One of the recent martyrs who paid with his life his love for Christ was Fr. Philoumenos. He was a loyal guard of the holy shrine at the well of Jacob in Samaria. He suffered a horrible death by unknown perpetrators. Ample proofs point to the Jews as the assailants of the monk-martyr. Orthodox people all over the world were, up-in-arms over this ghastly crime.

[Greece, during the years of the German occupation was beyond doubt a defender of the persecuted Jewish people. Greek Orthodox Christians, risked their lives to protect and to hide them. Many Greek families suffered destruction, because they aided Jews. It is regrettable that in return, Jews have massacred innocent Greek Orthodox Christian monks of the Holy Lands.] {113}

Bearing much indignation and with deep mourning for the murder of Fr. Philoumenos, the Orthodox Christians of the Greek Community in London, published a protest in memory of the martyr. Here follows an excerpt:

"A recent martyr of Christ is Fr. Philoumenos, an Orthodox priest who was born in Lefkosia, Cyprus, on October 15, 1913. He was the twin brother of Fr. Elpidios who is an ascetic monk on the Holy Mountain of Athos. Both of them at age 14 dedicated their lives to Christ.

Fr. Philoumenos enlisted in the Brotherhood of the Holy Sepulchre in 1934. He served in the ancient city of Sichar of Samaria, at the foothills of Mount Garizin, where today, the city of Neapolis (Naplous) is located. There is the well that was opened by Jacob, and where the famous dialogue between Christ and the woman of Samaria took place (John 4:1-42).

On the evening of November 29, 1979, criminals rushed into the shrine, took the kind monk, maltreated and tortured him. Before his eyes they defiled the chapel, the Cross and the Tabernacle of the Holy Altar. After they gagged him with his stole, they hit him with an ax on the head in the form of a cross. They took out his one eye and hit the other. They also broke his lower jaw and they cut the fingers of his right hand. With the ax they hit his left foot. Leaving the shrine, they threw a grenade of the Jewish army, which destroyed everything. {114}

The police were notified but until today it is unknown who and how many the slayers were, but it is certain that they were Jews.

The representatives of the Patriarch were not allowed to pray near the holy body of the monk, which finally was given to them six days later.

The funeral service took place at the Patriarchal Church of Saint Thekia by the Fathers of the Brotherhood. There he was buried near other deceased Brothers.

Cypriot compatriots of Fr. Philoumenos have suffered at the hands of Jews for centuries. In 115 A.D. the Jews killed 240,000 Greek Cypriots in order to take the island. However the Christians did not yield. It must be made known that many clergymen from Cyprus serve in the Holy Land in order to preserve and to protect all of the sacred things and places there."

With this epilogue the Greek Orthodox Community of London ended the statement and bestowed a tribute to the new martyr of Orthodoxy, Fr. Philoumenos. For these martyrs, guards, and supporters of Orthodoxy, we add our fervent prayers:

"Lord, You who were born, crucified, died as a man, buried and resurrected from the dead for our salvation, Christ our true God, preserve and strengthen the faithful and humble guards of Your Holy places, for the glory of Your Holy Name." {115}

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CONCLUSION

Evidence or Indications about the Holy Light

From the time of the Resurrection of the Lord until today, there is a separation of people as regards the Divine Person of Christ. Some are followers; some are enemies of our Lord, and in between are those who are lukewarm. In any case, all can benefit from reading the story of Fr. Mitrofanis' experiences.

For the skeptics it provides an opportunity to ponder and to do some soul-searching. For those who believe, this story strengthens their faith and it reinforces a greater love for the Resurrected Christ. For doubters and for those who are lukewarm, Fr. Mitrofanis' account of the marred column may kindle a spark of credence and reconsideration of God, HIS LOVE, and HIS miracles.

A. The Marred Column

On the left side of the entrance to the Church of the Resurrection, there are three columns, side by side. One of the columns is blackened and split toward the bottom. A historical account confirms as to how this one column became marred.

During the reign of Salem II, from the year 1517 and thereafter, the Armenians wanted to be the ones to receive the Holy LIGHT instead of the traditional {116} Orthodox. At that time an unheard of miracle occurred which no one was able to dispute.

The contemporary doubter could answer with this seemingly logical argument. "The column is really cracked and blackened from the smoke. How can smoke come from this LIGHT?" The Holy LIGHT is the presence of God. This fact is not by chance or any collusion. The unfaithful are blind to miracles. Since God is Omniscient, man cannot know or define the Will of God.

God is also LIGHT and LIFE and LIFE-GIVING power. Through this power He enlightens and

preserves life in the whole of creation. But LIGHT and the source of LIGHT (James 1:17) are not only the Father. LIGHT is also the Son (John 8:12). LIGHT is also the Holy Spirit, and for this reason Apostle Paul exhorts the faithful to walk in the LIGHT of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:9).

We see God the Father to appear as LIGHT and as a bright CLOUD, and also as fire with smoke. When Moses ascended Mount Sinai to receive the Tablets of the Law, there was thunder and lightning, and a thick cloud upon the peak And Mount Sinai was enveloped in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire, and the smoke thereof arose as the smoke of a furnace (Exodus 19:16-18).

The unfaithful asks: "Holy LIGHT with smoke?" God does not accept our orders as to how He should appear. God is independent. At the column He revealed Himself "in fire" with smoke "as the smoke of a furnace" to the {117} witnessing of the unfaithful. On Mount Sinai everything is charred and blackened "from the thunders" until today. Why then shouldn't the column at the entrance of the Church of the Resurrection not be?

The unfaithful again responds. This is an illusion that the clever have created in order to mislead the naive. However, the 'naive' are not few in numbers. They are the millions of faithful souls from all over the world. For them the Column is common conscience and common faith, which from it emerged the Holy LIGHT and then burst into a Divine Flame to mark the blessed pillar.

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B.The Heterodox

Prior to the service of the Holy LIGHT - every Holy Saturday, - all of the heterodox - the Armenians, Latins, Copts, and Syrians, as well, along with the Orthodox approach with much humility, to venerate the Patriarch, the Presiding Hierarch of Orthodoxy. The non Orthodox recognize him as a representative of the true faith and as Holy Father of the Church of Jerusalem, the Church, whose first Hierarch was Saint James the brother of the Lord.

The heterodox accept the Patriarch with a spirit of submission and obedience. They bestow to him respect and honor. They kiss with prostration his right hand. Now comes the question:

Is it possible then for the heterodox to consent to a {118} fraudulent "performance" of the LIGHT to mislead, the seven or ten thousand credulous pilgrims? No, the heterodox recognize unreservedly the TRUTH of the Holy LIGHT.

Therefore, there's much to be said about the authenticity of the Holy Saturday miracle. It is an undisputable fact that those of other faiths participate whole-heartedly in this pinnacle of the Easter celebration.

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THE INVESTIGATION

In order to remove any possibility of deception, the heterodox themselves conduct an extremely thorough inspection within and without the Holy Sepulchre for anything which could ignite combustible materials.

In addition, the Patriarch undergoes an exacting bodily search in the presence of many people.

Who, therefore, can disregard the genuineness of the Holy LIGHT after the stringent examinations of the total proceedings?

It must be remembered that when finally the Patriarch is ready to enter the Holy Sepulchre, he does not go alone. He is accompanied by an Armenian Monophysite clergyman who follows every movement with strict surveillance so as to avert anything striking of the underhanded.

However, up until today after twenty centuries, nothing , detrimental has been heard, neither the slightest slur {119} will be heard at the expense of the TRUTH of the Holy LIGHT. If from time to time false rumors are spread as to the veracity of the miracle, Truth prevails and falsehoods are dissipated.

EYEWITNESSES

Hosts of devout people with strong and ardent faith have seen the Divine LIGHT. Each according to the measure of his faith is made worthy to witness its manifestation. There are astounding similarities in the descriptions of what eyewitnesses perceive when the LIGHT appears. One may ask if people of different ages and gender, perhaps experience illusions and hallucinations. Disbelievers declare that only those who are psychologically unbalanced have delusions about the LIGHT which they claim to see.

It certainly is not a case of mass hysteria as evidenced by the fact that at every observance of the Resurrection in Jemsalem, thousands of pilgrims arrive in anticipation of the glorious event. When the Holy LIGHT is seen to flit in all of the spaces in and out of the Holy Sepulchre, within and without the Church of the Resurrection, at Golgotha, and even outside in the courtyard, there is, beyond, understanding, an outburst of enthusiasm and everyone seems to bask in a spirit of exaltation at the eerie phenomenon. {120}

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Justified Doubts

Now a strange question arises. What explanation can be given for the reality that a great number of people actually see the Holy LIGHT, and yet the presiding Patriarch is often denied the vision of the phenomenon?

The celebrant of the mysteries of God rarely is made worthy to see what he performs, because if he did, he would be seized with such fear and terror that he would be struck silent.

When the Prophet Zacharias, during the hour of incense saw the Archangel Gabriel standing near the Altar of the Temple, "he was troubled and fear fell upon him" (Luke 1:5 - 22). At that moment he was struck speechless.

Imagine what would happen if a celebrant saw the invisible side of what occurs during the Oblation at the Communion table or at any other mysteries performed in the Church! He would be at a loss to expound on the indescribable. Such was the case with Saint Paul and his visit to the third heaven.

Another reasonable doubt which the reader may have, is the attempt of Fr. Mitrofanis to witness a miracle. Today someone easily could hide in the niche and in league with the Patriarch present a "flame." However the cooperation for such a secret agreement is not a simple {121} matter. The

exacting scrutiny of the premises now precludes such a likelihood.

The bold and daring undertaking by Fr. Mitrofanis was prompted by belief and disbelief tugging at him constantly. His foolhardy endeavor was made because he thought that he would expose a hoax. Instead his verification of the miracle revealed his potential to become a teacher of the Truth of the Holy LIGHT, the Truth which was possible to silence skeptics and agnostics alike.

[Black and white photo](#)

While residing in a Thessaloniki home for the elderly, Fr. Mitrofanis meets with the author. Fr. Mitrofanis, overflowing with heavenly grace, prepares to encounter the eternal Light, our Lord Jesus Christ, in the New Jerusalem. {122}

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EPILOGUE

A most noble dream of any Christian is to travel to the Holy Land. Once this is accomplished, even under difficult circumstances, and he has returned to the comfort of his home, something unexplainable happens, even years later. His mind and heart are consumed with a desire to revisit and again to worship at the places sanctified by the presence of Christ 2000 years ago.

Of course, there are those who go simply out of curiosity as tourists. If a spark of a faith exists, they, too, may develop a desire to revisit.

The faithful Christian who lives a spiritual life and who returns to the Life-giving Tomb of his crucified Teacher is touched by the words of the Angel: "What do you seek? The living among the dead? He is not here. He is risen" (Luke 24:5,6).

The place which the angel mentions is the center of the salvation of man. From that Tomb emanate all of the Grace and Mercy of God to mankind. For the person of faith, that most holy place on planet Earth, does not create misgivings, nor does it provoke doubts and questions. Simply, there is belief in Him who was buried and was resurrected as a victor against death. Apostle Paul said, "If Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain" (I Corinthians 15:17).

Enemies of the Church, persecutors and slanderers of Christianity, remain speechless before the indisputable reality of {123} the splendor and the grandeur of the Holy LIGHT. Whatever anyone says or does, this LIGHT radiates throughout the universe. Devout pilgrims transport it as a heavenly blessing to faraway places and they preserve it during the whole year, lit in their churches and in their homes.

The Holy LIGHT, however, is not only the source of Divine Grace in the Holy Land. It is the primary phenomenon that attracts as a magnet every believing soul. The presence of God in the person of a humble Teacher, blessed everything - the sun, the air, the trees, the waters, the earth, the mountains and the ravines, the streets and the paths. Each place tells of Christ's existence here and of his miracles.

Every year people from all over the world flock to Jerusalem to find peace, joy, and inspiration. They yearn to be present to participate in the Divine Passion, to ascend the steep steps of Calvary, and to lament the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus on the Cross. Those, who approach the Tomb as the Myrrh-bearing Women did, become bearers of honor, love, and loyalty to the dead

and buried Lord. Finally they receive the Grace of the Resurrected Christ, the conqueror of death and sin.

During the service of the Holy LIGHT, there is a continuous steadfast prayer for the unity of all mankind. In this unique celebration, God enlightens receptive souls to accept and to believe in one True and Pure Faith. The realization of this will bring to fruition the words of the Lord: "Then there shall be one fold and one Shepherd" (John 10:16). The fulfillment of "Thy Kingdom come" will be evident when divisions and discord arising from schisms, heresies, and sects are relinquished. {124}

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COMMENTS FROM THE TRANSLATOR.

Fr. Mitrofanis had been granted grace by our Lord to witness what took place inside the Holy Sepulchre during the service of the Holy LIGHT. The attempt to translate his moving story created reverence and awe in my soul as it brought to mind memories of my pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The Divine Service of the Holy LIGHT!

A culmination of the Holy Week,

The Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ,

The Triumph of Orthodoxy,

The Feast of Feasts and

The Festival of Festivals!

One yearns to be close to the Holy Tomb during the service and to think of the celestial LIGHT instantaneously igniting the Kantili and the candles of the Patriarch.

This story undoubtedly transfers us to another realm of being. It lifts our hearts in songs of LOVE and THANKSGIVING for the blessings God has bestowed upon us.

After reading of Fr. Mitrofanis extraordinary experiences, my wish was for as many people as possible to have access to this unusual book. When Fr. Savvas, the author, asked me to translate it from Greek to English, I felt that now more readers could avail themselves of this small volume. At the same time I perceived myself as unworthy to undertake the task of working on such a profound piece of writing. However, with God's help, all was accomplished, hopefully satisfactorily. I thank the Lord for His support in this endeavor. Also I wish to thank Fr. Savvas for entrusting me with this translation. May those who read it find it, not only interesting, but also spiritually inspiring.

What a remarkable chain of events resulted in an intense and impressive story. The Lord allowed Fr. Mitrofanis to hide in the Holy Tomb. After a {125} lapse of time, when he disclosed to Fr. Savvas what he saw there, a singular, but heart-warming book took substance. We are much the richer for having read this most unusual account.

In order to achieve a suitable translation, I relied on two people and now I must thank them, Claudia Dounis, for her willingness to edit the script and Mary Zumpos, for her productive and final proofreading.

May our Lord grant to us the opportunity to visit the Holy Land during Easter, to participate in the Divine Services, and to light our Paschal candles from the hands of the Patriarch.

The humble servant of our Lord and unworthy translator,

Father Constantine Combisis.

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GLOSSARY

Ascetic - a person who leads a life of contemplation and rigorous self-denial for religious purposes; anyone who lives with

Asia Minor - a large peninsula in W. Asia between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean, including most of Asiatic Turkey; Pontos.

Easter - Christian celebration of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ; Paschal festival of the Church.

Fr. - Father;

Pater; Geronda Geronda - Spiritual father; confessor; mentor Golgotha - The place where Jesus was crucified; Calvary. (Mark 15:22) ' Heretic or Heterodox - Churches with beliefs which are different from the Christian Orthodox faith.

Holy Sepulchre -The tomb where Jesus was buried and from where he arose from the dead after three days; Holy Tomb; Life giving Tomb.

Kantili or kantila s. - kantilia or kantiles pi. - oil-burning vigil lights.

Latin Church - Roman Catholic Church; papist.

Orthodox - Eastern Christian Orthodox Church; Greek Christian Orthodox Church; Holy Catholic, and Apostolic Church.

Theotokos -All holy Virgin Mary; Panagia; Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ.

* Catholic here means universal and does **not**, by any means, signify the Catholic (Latin) Church of Rome. {127} {128}

Some references to LIGHT in the Bible

John 1:5

John 8:12

Psalms 27:1

Psalms 118:27 119:105

Isaiah 60:19

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Cited: Savva Achileos, I Saw the Holy Light. Athens, 2001.

Note of the site editor: number of pages are placed in braces {}.

Savva Achileos, I Saw the Holy Light