



The pulpit area of the Etz Hayyim Synagogue in Crete shows smoke and fire damage.

Synagogue

continued from page 1

the Hania police for their work in making the arrests and urged people to help restore the synagogue by making donations to groups such as the International Survey of Jewish Monuments (ISJM) and The Association of Friends of Greek Jewry.

"The most positive response to these anti-Semitic acts will be the complete restoration of Etz Hayyim," she said.

The Etz Hayyim synagogue, which dates back to the Middle Ages, is the only surviving Jewish monument on the island of Crete. It was restored in the late 1990s and has since become a memorial and a tourist attraction.

By 1941 most of the Jews in Crete had emigrated, leaving only the Hania community of about 270 people. They were deported by Nazi invaders in 1944 and died when their ship was bombed and sunk by the Allies.

Expressions of support

Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew sent a letter to the Jewish community of Greece through Moses Konstantinis, chairman of the Central Israeli Council of Greece, expressing "profound sadness" over the recent arson attempt against the synagogue.

"We condemn this deed as any other deed of violence and terrorism and, particularly, against sites of the worship of God," His All Holiness stated. "Furthermore, we express to you the deep sympathy of our Most Holy Church of Constantinople and ours too, as well as our deeply felt compassion over this sad event. We pray to God to protect you and the Jewish community in Greece from every assault."

Archbishop Demetrios of America stated:

"Clearly, such a sacrilege has been perpetrated by aberrant person or persons, who in no way represent the proud people of Crete or the Hellenic people as a whole, the names of whose heroes of the Holocaust are inscribed in the hearts of the Jewish people. We stand in solidarity with His All Holiness and all people of good will who condemn this cowardly act, and we pray for the swift restoration of this Synagogue, and for the well being of the historic Jewish community of Crete."

The attacks on the synagogue have also been condemned by Hellenes and government officials in Greece and the United States.

"This is another attack to spread anti-Semitism and racism in Greece," stated Andrew A. Athens, national chairman of the United Hellenic American Congress (UHAC), president of Hellenicare and president of the World Council of Hellenes (SAE). "These acts of violence will not be tolerated. The Jewish community in Greece honors the Hellenic tradition and works together with all to make Hellenism a shining example throughout the world."

Nicholas A. Karacostas, AHEPA supreme president, said, "These anti-Semitic attacks upon the Jewish community in Greece are simply unacceptable. We appeal to the people of Hania, and all Greek citizens, to come together to defy these acts of hatred, intolerance and bigotry."

US Rep. Carolyn Maloney (D-N.Y.) and US Rep. Gus Bilirakis (R-Fla.), co-chairs of the Congressional Caucus on Hellenic Issues, issued statements.

"We must not let this type of anti-Semitism percolate, as the world has seen the evil that stems from this type of hatred and bigotry," Maloney said. "We implore the people of Hania, and all Greek citizens, to voice their outrage against this intolerance."

Bilirakis added, "Now is a time to stand with Jewish community in Greece and against anti-Semitism and intolerance. I urge Greek authorities to conduct a swift and thorough investigation and bring to justice the perpetrators of these heinous attacks."

The Pan-Cretan Association of America declared: "We Cretans in the United States are outraged at all actions of anti-Semitism in Greece and all attempts to terrorize Greeks of Jewish faith."

St. Catherine's transcendent art treasures are gloriously preserved by the dry climate of the Sinai Desert. Massive crowds pass through the holy monastery daily in pursuit of even fleeting contact with their legacy.

But the authentic life of the monks is shared only by those who come as pilgrims, hoping to experience, not just sublime works of art, but the spiritual life that inspired those works – the greatest art form of all.

Nowhere is the monks' spiritual life more intimately shared than in their devout worship services. The timeless mystery of the Liturgy, begun in near-total darkness every morning, continues to unfold afterwards in the bright light of the monastery's arhontariki, or traditional reception room. There, in the upper reaches of the castle fortress, pilgrims join the monastics for refreshments, in fellowship which is considered an extension of the church worship.

Therefore, especially if the monastery Abbot is present, there will be only one conversation, in which all partake – no one must be isolated from the Body of Christ.

Even the seating serves the ideal, arranged for unity, in a single row around the perimeter of the room. Christian fellowship must be genuinely social, a liturgical expression of unity in love.

Usually a formal room inspiring Sunday manners, the arhontariki at St. Catherine's Monastery has rather a whimsical charm. Exotic firebirds from early Christian art flamboyantly guard painted ornamental gardens bordering the paneled ceiling. Below, portraits of elegant Greek royalty, more sedately, decorate the walls. Soon after the Abbot rises to conclude the morning interlude, the room returns to its silent contemplation of generations gone by, until its peaceful refuge is appropriated for conversation with a monastery spiritual father.

Geronta Pavlos, can we ask you what village you are from?

Yes, and what difference does it make compared to ...

Yes, of course, Geronta. ... but which one did you say ... ?

I'm from the Peloponnisos. My village is called Kranidi, in Argolida. It is opposite the island of Spetses.

The years that you were growing up, was village life pretty traditional? Were the people faithful?

Yes, the old-timers were strict, both in matters of faith and in their life. There, if someone gave his word on something, he wouldn't go back on it, he kept it no matter what. He didn't know how to tell lies – to become engaged to a girl and then abandon her, for instance. It was a formidable thing, a major sin to do such a thing. They were very straightforward people, their word was their contract.

And in church, did they follow the traditions?

Definitely. I remember when we were little children, we didn't have a lot of things, no clocks etc. The bell rang for us to go to church. Lipon, our parents, as soon as the first bell rang, said to us, "Get up quickly to go to church!" There was no, "Please get up now" such things – nothing like that. "Get up to go to church!" We grew up in that kind of environment.

Our environment today is so different. From life without clocks, to the 24/7 "information age!" Do the same standards still apply? Fasting, for instance. ... People fight a daily nightmare on the free-ways. One wants to find something easy for dinner, not worry about what the fast allows. In short, fasting in America often doesn't seem to be considered relevant.

Yes, but at the same time, people are in the habit of saying that "this or that particular food is fattening." And I often say to myself, "I've never heard a person remark that a particular food makes him thin [dissolves into laughter]!" Actually, we suffer today from overeating, not from fasting!! The fasting that the Church gives is very light – the Church doesn't command severe things. It is a change of foods.

In actuality it is the best form of diet. If one looks under the surface, he can see it is a matter of health of

HOLY LIGHT OF SINAI



Sister Joanna

Desert to City

Bringing monastic wisdom home



Photo by Bruce M. White Photography

Beginning at 4 a.m., Divine Liturgy is celebrated seven days a week in the katholicon, or main church, of St. Catherine's Monastery at Mount Sinai, whose official name is The Sacred and Imperial Monastery of the God-trodden Mountain of Sinai. Pilgrims are afterwards invited for coffee with the monks.

As St. Catherine's elected Dikaiois, **Geronta Pavlos** has been responsible for the spiritual life of the monastery for four decades. He represents the Archbishop during his frequent unavoidable absences, and oversees the daily worship services and large monastery garden. The hesychast geronta, devoted to ceaseless "prayer of the heart," also responds to the spiritual needs of countless Orthodox pilgrims, both within the monastery and throughout Greece and Cyprus. His insightful spiritual guidance is in constant demand.



Sr. Joanna has been associated with St. Catherine's Monastery since 1990 through its dependent monasteries in Greece and Sinai, most recently the historic Red Sea hermitage of Hamman Mousa (Springs of Moses), where the Hebrew people camped during the Exodus after the miraculous crossing of the Red Sea.

body – the fasting that the Church prescribes helps the bodily health of a person.

However, when a person is told he has all these details to follow, one food today, another tomorrow ... it comes as a lot of rules and regulations. If Orthodoxy is about freedom, where do all these rules fit in?

But the rules exist in order to hold you in freedom, because if the rules don't exist, neither does freedom. The rules promote freedom, you see. Now, there are vegetarians, by choice. The Church doesn't say to do this; people on their own abstain from meat for health. So, since it helps us, why shouldn't we fast, which, as suggested by the Church, is very light.

There are doctors today who base their therapy on fasting – complete fasting. "The first day you'll eat nothing, the second nothing, and the third you'll begin to drink a little juice." They help people who have serious weight problems, and many others.

Some say that "fasting isn't necessary, it's what's inside that matters, it doesn't matter what you eat ..."

It's a mistake for anybody to say that it isn't unnecessary. Our Christ, didn't he fast for 40 days? He didn't eat anything for 40 days. Why should He do such great fasting? And the Church doesn't ask for such a thing.

And when others do not understand?

We will say that "this is a matter of faith." And that it does good, both for the soul and for the body. If we say that, it is the truth.

Prayer also seems often difficult after a long day of stress. Not so much from lack of time, as from mental exhaustion.

Prayer is the sun of our soul ... Just as we cannot physically live without the sun, we cannot spiritually live without prayer. You will profit if you

make room for prayer, because it will enlighten your good works to be successful.

What prayer?

At home, at work, in the street, the mind can pray and be with God, and say "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Not many words, those are easy. But it requires carefulness.

If one is not advanced in prayer, it is easy to be distracted while saying the Jesus Prayer.

The mind will wander no matter what prayer you are saying – if you are reading prayers from a book, the mind will wander in order to understand what you are reading. One must be patient, and as soon as the mind wanders, bring it back – "Here!" He will be insistent on this point.

We hear of village grandmas in Greece who have a strong mystical connection to God in church, even though they don't understand the archaic Greek of the services.

Yes, because they achieve communication with God through their heart. With their mind, their thought, they might not understand, but with their heart – the heart is uneducated.

It's what?

[Laughs] Uneducated – the heart doesn't know anything about book learning.

What is prayer of the heart?

It is a great matter. The person might pray with the lips, the mouth. God accepts that prayer, but it isn't great, real prayer. One can pray also with his thought, his mind, but much more with his heart. According to the Church Fathers, the heart is at the center of one's spiritual being, just as the physical heart is the center of bodily function. But in order to get there, first of all spiritual struggle is required, and purity. As we said previously, one must become free from the passions, because if he is enslaved to the sins,

he cannot arrive at his heart.

What does a person feel who has arrived at purity of heart?

First of all, he is very peaceful inside. He doesn't despair – he closes the door to hopelessness once and for all. No matter what happens in his life. He has much love, both for himself and for others. Thusly he will descend to his heart, to the depth in other words, of his soul.

With faith, Geronta, how can we face the great trial of the loss of a loved one?

First of all, there is no such thing as "he died." The person doesn't die. The body does dissolve, but the soul doesn't die; it's immortal. Because of that the first Christians never said that someone died, neither did they use the term "graveyard," but they always used the word "cemetery" [its Greek root] implying one didn't die, but slept. Therefore real death doesn't exist for us. There is a transition from this temporary life to the eternal.

When one has this in mind and thinks about it, he will react with courage, with fortitude. And instead of grieving in anguish and tears, he prays for the soul of the one fallen asleep. And not only does he benefit, but the one who has left this life is also benefited.

Will that fill the void he feels?

Very of course! He will be helped very much in that way.

What role does psychiatry play in the healing of the soul. Is it the same as confession?

No, it is a different thing, because the person who goes to a psychiatrist is spiritually ill, in his soul. The faithful Christian who goes to confession is not spiritually ill; he is healthy, because he understands that he erred, that he made a mistake. Fundamental to this is that one hopes that God will help him, that He will forgive him. Whereas the person who goes to a psychiatrist has arrived at despair – a person who has lost hope doesn't go to confession. That's the basic difference.

Can a psychiatrist help the person who has fallen into despair?

Certainly, because science is from God. He will give him boldness and courage to leave despair behind. Many psychiatrists recommend to their patients to go to confess – important psychiatrists, because they have seen in fact that people are benefited by it.

With confession, prayer, with fasting and all the help that our Church has, gradually God comes and enlightens the mind of a person, and by Divine Light he sees the truth ...

... the truth that "shall set you free." With your holy blessing, Geronta, thank you.