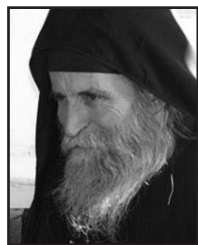


# in the heart

As St. Catherine's elected Dikaios, **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.

Some from within, from our own freedom, because we want to see things in a bad way. But others come from outside, against our will. Those that we don't want are from the evil one – such as thoughts of blasphemy, faithlessness. The devil brings them to us and we repel them, we cast them out – those we are not responsible for – because those thoughts which upset us are not our own. They come from outside, and we reject them.

As we said, the beginning of sin is in thought, and we have to hit sin at its beginning, before it enters inside us. Because if it enters inside us and we turn it into action, it is more difficult to uproot it. It is much easier to struggle if we don't do the sin.

**Geronta, this struggle against the thoughts is so much more difficult than it looks – what about when we fail?**

Above all, Sr. Joanna, know that God is love! He doesn't look at things with a human eye, because He is God. It is good for

a person at every moment of his life to do the will of God, but if he doesn't manage it totally, in every instance, God does not cease loving him. Note this! The love of God is a mystery, it is not like our love.

But when we don't do the will of God, we ourselves lose.

#### What do we lose?

We lose the peace of our soul. Within us we don't have happiness, peace. A difficult, bitter condition takes their place. But when we do the will of God, we are peaceful, we have much love inside us, hope, and also a happiness which is real, heavenly happiness. This is what we must focus on above all.

*Geronta Pavlos continues this discussion in upcoming issues of The Hellenic Voice, with specific counsels on maintaining peace of soul through the action of Divine Grace in everyday situations, including help for young adults in making important choices.*

# The Romanian spring tradition of Martisoare

By **CHRISTINA SEMON**

By the end of February, most Romanians get ready to celebrate the beautiful tradition of Martisoare on March 1, as spring begins.

Martisoare are brooches that usually are handmade with red and white thread tied to them. The white represents purity and the red represents life. Both women and men give them to women as a symbol of the rebirth of nature.

This year in Cluj, Romania, people had such creative designs! It seemed like the whole city was covered with martisoare. I tried to visit many places to see all of the different designs that artists had created. Some looked inexpensively made, while others looked more elaborate and expensive. Some were made out of plastic or clay, and others of colored metal.

At the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center, I also got to see how the martisoare are made. With the staff and mothers, I took part in an arts and crafts activity in which each of us could display our own artistic talents while creating our martisoare. We made more than 200 hundred of them, and we sold them for the benefit of the center at a local church



**OCMC missionaries Christina Semon, left and Ancuta Frantz, right, make martisoare at the Protection of the Theotokos Family Center for young mothers and children in Cluj, Romania.**

after the Divine Liturgy.

Not only was I very happy to participate and learn about such an important Romanian tradition, but this activity also had such good outcomes: It allowed us to sit around the table and talk with each other and to raise much-needed funds for the center.

The center serves as a daytime care and counseling center for infants and young mothers in an effort to combat the growing problem of infant abandonment. The center is directed by Orthodox Christina Mission Center missionary Ancuta Frantz.

## Christian pilgrims travel to Jerusalem

**JERUSALEM (AP)** – Hundreds of Christians from around the world marched from the Mount of Olives into Jerusalem to mark Palm Sunday, retracing the steps of Jesus 2,000 years ago.

The pilgrims waved national and church flags and followed a white donkey, which according to Christian tradition was the way Jesus entered the holy city.

A few dozen Israeli police stood by, a small fraction of the forces on duty in recent weeks because of Palestinian unrest. There were no incidents in Jerusalem on Palm Sunday.

"I see the problems here as a part of the trip, just showing the extremes of

this God-drenched city," said Jane Voigts, a pastor from San Luis Obispo, California. "I've really seen more grace and hope amidst the suffering here."

In past weeks, Palestinian demonstrations followed disclosure of Israeli plans to build apartments in east Jerusalem, as well as rededication of an ancient synagogue in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem's Old City.

Most West Bank Palestinians were banned from Jerusalem March 28 in keeping with standing Israeli regulations. Palestinians and backers demanding free access to the holy city briefly broke through a crossing between the West Bank town of

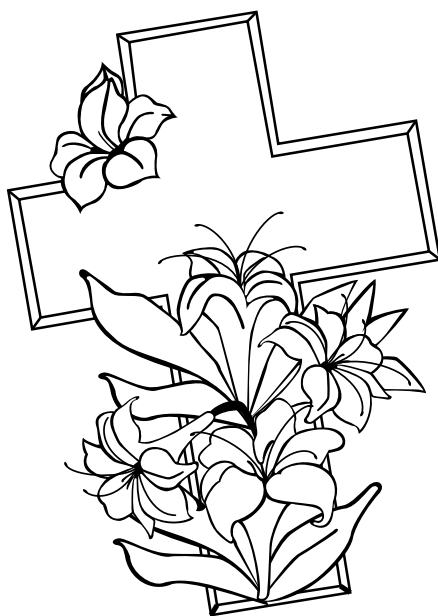
Bethlehem and Jerusalem. Police drove them back and arrested 12. Palestinians said one of those arrested was local Fatah activist Abbas Zaki.

Others celebrated at the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem, the traditional birthplace of Jesus, and in the Gaza Strip, home to a small Christian population.

This year the Roman Catholic, Protestant and Orthodox Churches mark Holy Week on the same dates. The Orthodox Church uses a different calendar from the others, but they coincide every few years.

*To all our families  
we serve,  
may your loved  
one's memory  
be eternal.*

*A blessed Easter  
Kalo Pascha  
from Louis Fazio  
and Scott Laurin*



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## Remembering Archbishop Iakovos

*Christ is risen from the dead, by death trampling down death, and to those in the tombs bestowing life*

Dearly Beloved,  
Christ is Risen!

Saturday, April 10, marks the close of a blessed chapter in the history of the Holy Archdiocese of America, for it is the 5th Anniversary of the falling asleep of our revered and beloved predecessor, the late Archbishop Iakovos.

From the moment he arrived on the shores of this nation in the spring of 1939, His Eminence labored long and hard, leading our community from its immigrant roots into the mainstream of American society. A champion of civil and religious rights throughout the years, he faithfully served with distinction and exemplary dedication as Primate of North and South America for over 37 years and, truly, in the words of St. Paul, he "fought the good fight, he finished the race, he kept the faith" (2 Timothy 4:7). In recognition of this anniversary, I would kindly ask that all of the parishes of our Holy Archdiocese of America offer a five-year Memorial Service at the conclusion of the Divine Liturgy on Sunday, April 18, beseeching the Almighty to grant eternal rest to the soul of this tireless worker in the Vineyard of our Lord.

Let this be not only an opportunity to pray for his eternal repose but also an occasion to thank God for blessing our Church with such a distinguished clergyman who touched the lives of countless individuals. May his memory be eternal!

With love and esteem  
in the Risen Lord,

+ DEMETRIOS  
Archbishop of America

## Modern proverbs for living

By REV. DR. C.N. DOMBALIS

Until we see God clearly, face to His blessed face, we will not know what we have been searching for far and wide. For in that precious sight it will be such a union that our breathing and our thinking and talking will be "God." Eternity will be tasted and savored.

When we are too young to have any religion of our own, the important thing is not to think much but to love much.

Christian faith is preference for life over against death. It is faith in the goodness and blessedness of creation.

By learning to walk upright, we also learn how to kneel. We cannot kneel without learning how to walk upright.

God has set before us life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live (Deut. 30:19).

One drunk on wine is more tolerable than one drunk on hateful love.

The end of prayer is to be snatched away to God.

Sin is a religious word, for it is a word that makes sense when we know ourselves to be in relation with God.

Greek Orthodoxy holds to the belief of the Real Presence of God during the celebration of the Liturgy as well as in the Eucharist. The Real Presence of God in the Liturgy helps those who come with unsettled emotions and destructive feelings.

Love does not go looking for evil. When love does come upon evil, love looks the other way and excuses those who commit it. This is to be our attitude.

The Rev. Dr. C.N. Dombalis is dean emeritus of the Greek Orthodox Cathedral of Richmond, Va. He served as a delegate to the United Nations, where he helped author the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

## Divine Grace Part 2:

# Guarding the Heart in Love

The Fathers of the Church say that in the beginning one avoids sin out of fear of the consequences. A little further on, because of hope in the reward. And at a yet more perfect stage, purely from love for God.

Many people would say that life began for them as they realized how to love Christ with their very existence, to connect with Him, and feel His grace. As has been said many times, Orthodoxy is not about God; it is the experience of God.

After all, the triumph of the authentic Christian way of life is the means it affords to love God in practice, not just imagination. "If you love Me, you will keep My commandments," Christ says.

In the *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, St. John Climacus, the great 6th century Sinai ascetic, writes that a Christian is one who imitates Christ in word and deed and in thought. "In every way of life," he says, "ask yourself: 'Am I really doing this in accordance with God's will?'"

Thoughts give birth to words and deeds. Therefore, one must "hit sin at the beginning," Geronta Pavlos of Sinai says, by guarding the heart from thoughts unwelcome to Christ.

For, once admitted, such thoughts easily lead to sins that become bad habits, or "passions," difficult to uproot – driving out the Divine Grace which is the source of every blessing.

**Geronta, you said the experience of Divine Grace is won by driving out bad thoughts with good (The Hellenic Voice, March 31, 2010). But thoughts move at the speed of light. What about when we fail?**

Above all, Sr. Joanna, know that God is love! He doesn't look at things with a human eye, because He is God. It is good for a person at every moment of his life to do the will of God, but if he doesn't manage it totally, in every instance God does not cease loving him – note this! The love of God is a mystery; it is not like our love.

But when we don't do the will of God, we ourselves lose.

### What do we lose?

We lose the peace of our soul. Within us we don't have happiness, peace. A difficult, bitter condition takes their place. ... But when we do the will of God, we are peaceful; we have much love inside us, hope, and also a happiness which is real, heavenly happiness. This is what we must focus on above all.

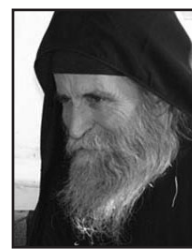
### Then what can we do when a



Photo by Bruce M. White Photography

**The famous Sinai icon of the Ladder of Divine Ascent shows monks approaching closer to God as they ascend the ladder of the virtues, by struggling for freedom from the sinful passions.**

As St. Catherine's elected Dikaios, **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.



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### bad thought just won't go away – returns persistently, like a fly?

We repeat the Prayer. We have that great weapon for our use, the Prayer of the Lord: *Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me.*

### And if they still persist...?

... We still insist. With the Prayer. ... We will not desist.

### In the monastic environment, we get relief in this matter by confessing distressing thoughts.

That is good outside the monastery too.

### We are frequently cautioned in the monastery not to believe all our thoughts, to "keep a doubt."

## LIVES OF THE SAINTS

### Demetrios the Neomartyr – April 14

The rugged Peloponnesus Mountains, with a terrain barren for human sustenance, has been occupied for centuries by Greeks even more rugged than their surroundings. The paucity of arable soil allowed for a scant population, most of whom lived in tiny villages such as Ligoudista and Arkadia, the home of Demetrios the Neomartyr.

The uninviting terrain discouraged the less hardy from settlement in this area, but because of the proximity of Demetrios' village to the city of Tripolis, the conquering Turks had by the early 19th century firmly controlled the area, choosing not to pursue the Greeks who took to the remote regions of the mountains.

Demetrios grew up in the village where more than three centuries of Turkish domination had developed a society divided in religion but forced to live together for the common good in an atmosphere that was a scant quarter-century away from revolution in the childhood days of a man who was to become a martyr for Christ, not out of circumstance but out of choice. He was another of the uninitiated and untrained who were mediocrities until called upon to show their devotion to Jesus Christ.

Apprenticed to a Turkish contractor, Demetrios was still a teenager toiling for a meager subsistence when he came to a fork in the road of his life, at which point he made an unfortunate choice. Born and bred a Christian, the naive youth was beguiled by his Muslim employer into a dis-

avowal of Christ with the assurance that his conversion to Islam was his only hope for the good life reserved only for those whose ranks he joined. Thus brainwashed, the lad remained in good stead with the ruling class, satisfied to be a Muslim so long as he really meant to offend no one. He even accepted the name of Mehmet as a token of his good intentions.

Demetrios was not long in finding out that the road to hell was paved with good intentions. Screened from his Christian friends, he was one day reached by his overwrought father who managed to draw the boy away from the miasma that clouded his thinking and was drawn into the clear sunlight of Christianity once again. His several months of spiritual captivity ended with a loving father's care which once again unleashed the erring son's true feeling. He reached out for Jesus Christ in supplication and prayer for forgiveness, after which he wept in contrition. Turning his back on Tripolis, he made his way to Smyrna, from where he boarded a ship bound for the island of Chios where he hoped to show his sincere repentance and once again bask in the glory of Christianity.

At Chios, he was admitted to a monastery in which he was determined to cleanse himself of his shameful act, thereafter to serve the Savior with all his heart. His confessions were heard by sympathetic monks who were deeply moved by the young man's profound remorse which convinced

them he was qualified to remain among them, eventually to be tonsured a monk after the proper period of training. Demetrios was convinced that he could find forgiveness after hearing the abbot tell him of Peter's denial of Christ, after which Peter repented and became the sainted man who preached to the end of his days for the Savior.

The days at the monastery were filled with earnest prayer and devotion by Demetrios who bore himself in a manner of the highest ascetic traditions, but he was troubled by an unfulfilled wish to commit an act which would completely expiate his long forgiven act. He felt that the only way to achieve complete absolution was to return to the scene of his wrongdoing and there to reassert his belief in Christ before those who had taken advantage of his foolish innocence. The abbot tried to dispel this notion by citing the decision of David to preach the word of God for all his days rather than sacrifice himself in untimely death.

Demetrios knew in his heart he could not rest unless he faced the Turks of Tripolis. He returned to openly avow his devotion to Jesus and for this he was executed. The remains of this brave lad who willingly gave his life for Christ on April 14 lie in St. Demetrios Church in Tripolis, Greece.

(Reprinted with permission from *Orthodox Saints, Vol. 2* by Fr. George Poulos.)

You see a dream and believe it. Now that dream can be from the evil one, from the devil. That's why the great author St. John Climacus says we must not believe in dreams – even when they seem good to us. One must be careful, because while it might be from God it can also be from the evil one. So the saints tell us not to believe in our dreams.

**St. John has a whole chapter on "Remembrance of Wrong." Indeed, when someone has done us an injustice, it creates bitter thoughts particularly hard to drive out. ...**

We will try to tell ourselves, that person did not know what he did, he didn't do it with his heart, you see. ... That is the "righthand" thought, the good one. We will say that he did it by mistake, without realizing what he was doing. Or, that he didn't know any better. ... And so we make allowances.

### Jealous thoughts?

We'll fight jealousy another way. You can easily cry with the misfortune of another, but as the holy Chrysostomos says, it is more difficult to rejoice in his good fortune. We will try to make the other's happiness our own – by saying, "He is my brother, therefore this good fortune is mine as well. If they honor him, they honor me." We make his happiness our own happiness. In this way jealousy departs. Whereas if we say, "Why are they honoring him more than me?" that is a bad, a jealous, thought.

It requires force, struggle, to rejoice with those rejoicing, even though, as the holy Chrysostomos says, easily you make his sorrow your own and cry together with him.

### Hopelessness? Thoughts of despair attack at times. ...

That is absolutely the worst thing. There is nothing worse. It is the greatest sin. We Christians who are faithful and want to imitate our Christ in His life, must never – not only never open the door to hopelessness, but not even touch the door to hopelessness! All evil begins there. A great evil. We must never despair – God will be there for us. Hope is what holds us in life.

The Apostle Peter denied Christ. But he repented. He didn't despair. Judas himself didn't do something worse; he betrayed Christ, from avarice. But he despaired and went and hung himself. He didn't grasp onto hope. If he had reached for hope, Christ would have forgiven him for what he did. Whereas in the case of Peter, who returned holding on to hope, Christ honored him and restored to him all his former apostolic state.

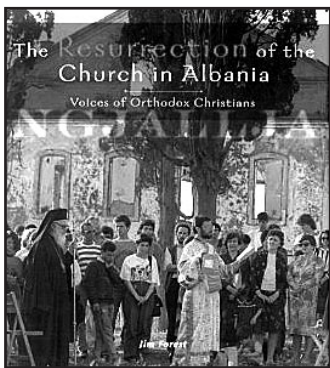
We must bear these things in mind always. ...

## Book Review

# Mission and Resurrection in Albania

By FR. STANLEY S. HARAKAS

Here you will find one of the most interesting and engaging collections of real life personal experiences! The stories engage you with all of the drama and pathos of a contemporary struggle against the real and violent forces of evil and with the astounding rebirth of an almost extinguished Christian community in a small nation of southeastern Europe – Albania.



Go Forth! Mission and Resurrection in Albania, Luke A. Veronis, Conciliar Press, 2009

Most Orthodox Christians are unaware of the rich history of missions in their Church. An even more closed door is the actual life of Orthodox missionaries. What in fact do Orthodox missionaries do? Well, if you are curious enough to find out, I heartily recommend to you this book, which is a collection of very human, very inspiring, very interesting and very attention-grabbing missionary stories. After reading this book, you will have most of your questions answered, and will have entered into the real life experiences and reflections of a modern-day Orthodox missionary.

Perhaps the reason for most Orthodox Christian indifference to Orthodox Christian missions is that following the 15th century, most Orthodox churches found it almost impossible to do what Jesus Christ told us to do: "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel to the whole creation" (Mark 16:15).

The reason for this lack of mission sensitivity was the stifling conditions of the Muslim oppression of the Church that reached to the beginnings of the 19th century. When, at long last the Ottoman Empire came to an end, there was, with the exception of Orthodox Russia, an almost total lack of comprehension of anything related to missions by Orthodox Christians. Four centuries in the self-preservation mode had left the Orthodox clergy and laity without a missionary consciousness.

All this began to change radically about 50 years ago in the minds and hearts of a small number of clergy and laity in Greece. One of the leading figures in this tiny movement was a young Greek clergyman, Anastasios Yannoulatos. He and his associates began a revival of Orthodox mission consciousness with the publication (at first mimeographed and only later printed) of a magazine titled Porefthendes. The periodical was also issued in English, with the title Go Ye!, which essentially is also the title of this book, "Go Forth!" In one sense, Fr. Veronis' book is a fruition of the aspirations of that first effort in re-kindling Orthodox interest in missions.

Fr. Luke Veronis, the son of one of the most distinguished missionary minded priests of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, Fr. Alexander Veronis, has moved forward in advancing the sense of mission in the Orthodox Church in the United States and Canada. In "Go Forth!" he has provided a beautiful, moving and truly inspiring collection of personal stories describing the triumphs and successes as well as the painful failures and disappointments of a modern-day missionary.

It is almost impossible to stop reading these stories, one after another, that describe realistically his missionary experiences. Page after page describes real-life efforts, real human encounters, real suffering, real victories and real experiences of God in the mundane realities of a dirt poor nation struggling to overcome and realize a spiritual reawakening.

Fr. Luke became interested in Orthodox missions as a student at Holy Cross School of Theology in Brookline, Mass. Soon after graduation he responded to the missionary calling by serving as a missionary in Africa, where he got to know Archbishop Anastasios. Later, in 1994 he followed Anastasios to Albania.

The Albanian Orthodox Church, along with all religious expression, had been almost exterminated by the four-decade ruthless, atheistic communist rule of Enver Hoxha. With the end of the communist rule in 1992, the resurrection of the church commenced, hence, the sub-title of this engaging book: "Stories of Mission and Resurrection in Albania."

One of the most inspiring characteristics of this volume is how effortlessly and unobtrusively Fr. Luke garners spiritual lessons from the multitude of authentic stories of the struggles and ordinary yet courageous and uplifting relationships of his and his family's life as missionaries.

You will not be able to put this book down easily once you start reading. A goodly number of photographs adorn the volume, giving it a concrete and human context. On the cover of the book is a photograph of Fr. Luke offering the Paschal light at a Resurrection Service held outdoors at one of the main boulevards of the capital city of Tirana with 20,000 people joyfully receiving the Light of the Resurrection with the candles in their hands.

If you look very carefully at the front cover, pictured in the bottom corner there is a woman receiving the light. She is smiling with radiant joy in sharing in Christ's Resurrection. I predict if you read this book, you will share in that same joy!

Fr. Stanley S. Harakas is Archbishop Iakovos Professor of Orthodox Theology, Emeritus, Holy Cross Greek Orthodox School of Theology, Brookline, Mass.

## Divine Grace Part III

# Divine Communion in Fire and Spirit

Moses perceived in the Bush the great mystery of your child-birth. The children vividly pre-figured this, standing in the

HOLY LIGHT OF SINAI



Sister Joanna

midst of fire and remaining unconsumed, O undefiled and holy Virgin. Wherefore we hymn you unto all the ages.

The "children" in this troparion from the beloved Akathistos

Hymnos are the three youths of the book of Daniel. Their stirring faith is commemorated in one of the most moving accounts of the Old Testament, so inspiring it is referenced every day in the daily cycle of Church services.

Condemned to horrific death in a flaming furnace – for having stood true to their holy faith – the three youths neither questioned God's judgment nor railed against the cruel prospect before them.

Cast into the fiery furnace, they justified their fate as warranted by the sins of their nation – even though, personally, they were blameless. And, having proclaimed God able to save them if He so wished, they fervently praised Him regardless of their fate.

The amazing faith evinced by this epic demonstration of "good thoughts" drew the miraculous response of Divine Grace. The fiery flames, so hot they had burned impious pagans outside the furnace, changed inside to a cool whistling wind, without harming the youths in their midst at all.

Ever since Moses' experience of Divine Grace at the Burning Bush, where God spoke to him from within the flames, the history of Orthodox spirituality is that of Divine Grace itself.

Geronta Pavlos of St. Catherine's Monastery helps bring this history alive within the souls of pilgrims to Mount Sinai – both those who travel there physically, and those who make the journey alone on the wings of their unseen spiritual struggle.

**What happened, Geronta, when the Mother of God appeared on Mount Sinai centuries ago?**

The monks had decided to abandon the monastery, as they had nothing to eat. But first they decided to go up to venerate the Holy Summit one last time before leaving (as the monastery is located at the base of the Mount of the Ten Commandments). As they were ascending, Panagia appeared in their path as a Bedouin woman.

She told them, "Go back, because food supplies have arrived at the monastery." And they found a caravan had indeed arrived with food, which the doorkeeper said was brought by a woman, who then disappeared.

And the monks built a church at the point where Panagia appeared to them, where God provided for them, that we call Panagia Oikonomissa. It is half an hour up the stairs toward the Holy Summit.

**It's interesting, in light of what you said about hope and "the good thought" drawing Divine Grace (The Hellenic Voice, March 31, April 14, 2010) that the monks did not**

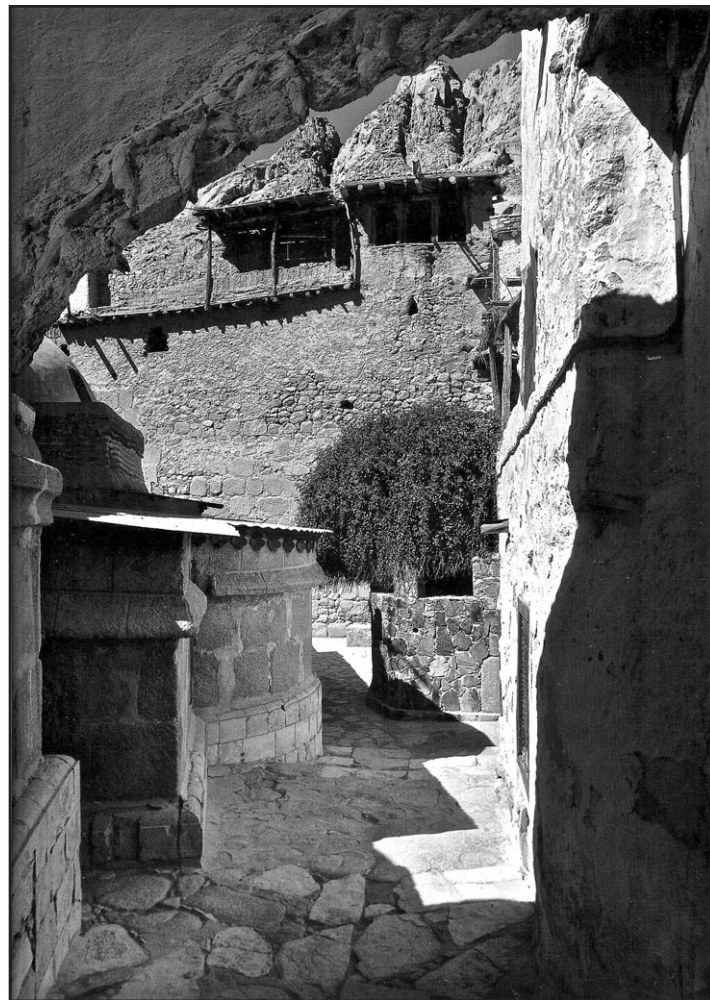
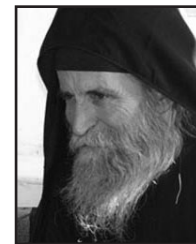


Photo by Bruce M. White Photography

**The Burning Bush, just outside the basilica church of St. Catherine's Monastery, symbolizes the Ever-Virgin Mother of God in Orthodox hymnology, as both were "afame though not consumed" by the fire of Divinity.**

As St. Catherine's elected Dikaios, 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.



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**despair, but undertook the strenuous climb to the top of Mount Sinai to seek God's grace, before enacting their thought to leave the monastery.**

They went up to pray, to seek the help of God, and Divine Grace took care of them.

**Are miraculous events only a thing of the past in Sinai?**

Greeks came to the Red Sea centuries ago to live in El Tor (ancient Raitho) – where Christian Orthodox still live. A woman named Maria Paramili told us about a miracle that the Saint did for an acquaintance of hers there.

The hospital doctors had written this woman off, when she asked Maria, who was coming to St. Catherine's for the weekend, to bring her an *evlogia*, something blessed, from the monastery.

Although they did not expect to find her alive when they returned, Maria brought her oil from the candle of St. Catherine. The sick woman anointed herself with it, she believed, and when the doctors returned they found her sitting up in bed smiling.

They were shocked, of course, saying there's no possible logical explanation for the change.

**When did this miracle happen?**

Not long ago.

**In the last year or so?**

No ... around 20 or 30 years ago. Here, "time" has another dimension! [laughingly] Moses came here to the well [near the Burning Bush] where he found the daughters of Jethro, 1,250 years before Christ – do you see!

**I have a question about this, because many times miracles happen, but many times they don't ... and those people had faith too ...**

Yes, but pay attention to see. ... Our Christ Himself said that faith must be strong, warm. When you doubt and think, "Can this oil really make me well, after all the doctors have said ..." then you hesitate, your faith is not warm.

But further, we must remember there is no such thing as death. Through illness, many people, even children, leave this

life as holy martyrs. We have many child martyrs in the Church – St. Catherine wasn't even 20.

We don't cry for the martyrs but we rejoice in their reward, because they left this temporary life for a better, eternal one...

**The famously clairvoyant Geronta Porphyrios was quoted as saying, "That illness (cancer) has filled heaven!" Did he mean the grace of God may sometimes allow bodily illness because it enlightens one to take better care for his soul?**

In love – for the person's good – yes. But not as punishment. God is not like the human courtroom where, "You did this bad thing, you'll receive that punishment." God is love, He is mercy. Punishment would be opposite to His love.

However, it's possible that we punish ourselves, like when a person ruins his health by drinking too much alcohol, which the body is not made to tolerate.

**Is this why Christ says, after healing someone, "Sin no more, so that something worse does not befall you?"**

What is sin – it is when a person, with his own will, casts out the grace of God.

With despair, we drive out the grace of God. When we judge others we drive away the grace. Therefore we must be careful, to be humble, simple, children in soul. We must not judge others, even in thought.

**What about some of the less obviously wrong thoughts that can lead us away from Divine Grace? For instance, I think I need to drink a glass of milk, and it's Great Lent.**

We'll ask someone who has experience in spiritual matters. That is, we don't rely on our own self, our thought, our own opinion.

**Or, today's Sunday, or a major feast day. But I'm feeling tired, and then there's a sale on at the store where I need to buy something ... so I won't go to church today ...?**

Experienced people, the strugglers, say that we won't go to church when we have a temperature above 104 degrees! (Laughingly) When we can't get up or walk, then we don't go to church! Lower than 104, we'll make the effort! (laughs again)

**Church attendance is not optional, then?**

No indeed! Because it is divine communion, we commune with God. The church is the ark, as in the epoch of Noah. As many as entered the ark were saved, while the others drowned in the flood. Church attendance is not just required – it is mandatory!

Not that God will punish us if we don't go to church. Rather, we ourselves lose when we don't go. Our church is the ark – we enter it and are saved. Outside the church we cannot be saved.

**By your counsels, Geronta, we will "sing, praise, and bless the Lord" there together with the three holy youths, rescued from trials by "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit."**

## In brief

### Scholarships available

Faith: An Endowment for Orthodoxy and Hellenism will fund a limited number of Archdiocese travel scholarships for students to participate in the Ionian Village program this summer.

As part of an effort to make Ionian Village accessible to more families, the endowment will offer both partial and full scholarships for teenagers who demonstrate financial need.

To apply for a scholarship, visit [www.ionianvillage.org](http://www.ionianvillage.org). The Ionian Village office must receive the application no later

than May 1. For more information, call the Ionian Village office at (646) 519-6190.

### Chrysostom Scholarship Program continues

Hellenic College will continue to award a scholarship to the winner of the senior division Chrysostom Oratorical Contest of each participating parish. The scholarship provides full tuition for the first year and 80 percent of tuition for each of the following three years, providing the student maintains a 3.0 GPA and adheres to the conduct and standards expected of a student in the col-

lege. Winners are not guaranteed admission to Hellenic College. Students must satisfy admission requirements for the college in order to be eligible for the scholarship. The estimated value of the scholarship over four years of study is approximately \$68,000.

To apply, contact Gregory Floor, admission director, at (617) 850-1285 or at [gfloor@hchc.edu](mailto:gfloor@hchc.edu). For more information, visit [www.hchc.edu/hellenic/admissions/anniversary-scholarships-continued.html](http://www.hchc.edu/hellenic/admissions/anniversary-scholarships-continued.html).



## Praying with tears for enemies

By ARCHIMANDRITE NEKTARIOS SERFES

*“Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.”*

— Psalm 126.5-6

Our prayers should come from our whole being: mind, heart and soul. This will be a familiar idea to most Christians, and we know that for our prayers to touch the heart of our loving God, we must strive to be “in tune” with Him, directed by the Holy Spirit. But we have said “our whole being,” and this means our emotions as well.

There will be occasions in our prayer life when we are so filled with joy and thanksgiving that we may feel inclined to almost do what King David did – dance and sing and laugh before the Lord! But it is equally true that on many occasions our prayers should be accompanied by tears – tears of repentance, tears of grief, tears of sorrow – as we bear up someone in trouble to the Throne of Grace.

When was the last time we prayed with tears? Our tears contain and express all the wonder we feel as we think about the sacrifice of our Savior on the cross. We share the tears of the Mother of God, the saints and the martyrs. The whole Church, in its daily task of revealing the Gospel to all men, should weep for the waywardness of men’s hearts, the continuing battle against the temptations of the world. We see, every day, the wickedness of man against man, and our prayers surely must come with weeping.

The Creator Himself of both heaven and earth hears our prayers, and He particularly loves to hear us pray with tears. Our prayers should always burn with love for God and His Church – and that means everyone within the Church – as well as for those who are our enemies. You may say, “I haven’t an enemy in the world – what are you talking about?” Any enemy of God, those who reject the truth of the Gospel, who fight against our beliefs, who promote false religions or no religion at all, are our enemies as well.

It always comes down to the fact that if we love our enemies, then we begin to know the Lord and the sweetness of the great grace of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit teaches us to love our enemies – just as our Lord Jesus loved those who persecuted Him, and prayed for them – so that our soul pities them as if they were our own children.

Sadly enough, our sinful nature makes us people who desire destruction, not least for those who try to destroy our Church. This happens because we have failed the call that we should weep for them as we pray. We must seek the Holy Spirit to teach us afresh how to pray, how to be enfolded in the love of God. He who has learned the love of God will indeed shed many tears for the whole world.

Of course it is not right, as pious Orthodox Christians, that we should judge anyone, nor desire punishment or torments for God’s enemies. He alone can do this, and we know that He is a merciful and gracious God, not willing that anyone should perish, but come to the knowledge of the truth.

What a surprise it would be to find a person we have judged sharing the same paradise with us! For we all need the truth and blessing of God, His forgiveness and mercy. Standing in the paradise of God, we would see that we had made a terrible mistake by being judgmental towards our enemy. We would learn that God forgave our enemy through prayer and tearful repentance – just as He forgave us.

It is crucially important that not one of us should have, spiritually, a heart of stone. Stone hearts have no life, and are useless in the loving service of our Savior. There is no place for a hard heart in the Kingdom of God. In that Kingdom, in His paradise, is gentleness and humility and the love of Christ, who pities all mankind.

The grace of our Lord God does not dwell in the person who does not love his enemies. The great grace of our Savior Jesus Christ is with that person who loves all mankind, and prays with tears for his enemies.

So, to return to the psalm with which we began, let our prayers for the world be sown in tears, so that our Lord may bring about the rich harvest of saved souls, men and women turned from being enemies of God into being his loving servants. The prospect that devoted prayer, with weeping, may bring about the transformation of the world, is surely too wonderful to miss!

Peace to your soul!

*The Very Rev. Archimandrite Nektarios Serfes is pastor of Saints Constantine & Helen Church in Boise, Idaho.*

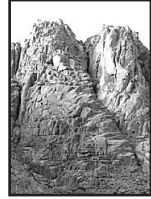
## Divine Grace Part IV

# Defeat and Victory: To the Glory of God

*Those who do not uproot evil thoughts from the heart cannot fail to manifest them in corresponding evil deeds. ...*

*When you perceive an evil thought, repel it and immediately call upon Christ to defend you ...*

**HOLY LIGHT OF SINAI**  
*(A)wakened by His disciple, Jesus as God will rebuke the winds of evil.*



Sister Joanna

*Some regard as lapses only those sins which are actually put into effect. They do not take into account the defeats and victories which occur on the plane of thought. ... I take it that the scriptural words, “They said ‘peace’, but there was no peace” (Ezekiel 13.10) apply to such people. ...*

— St. Philotheos of Sinai

The classic works of the spiritual literature are very clear in their directions on how Christian life is sincerely pursued.

Often composed of short, numbered statements, it is easy to see where personal improvement is called for. Or, it would be – if one already had the self-knowledge which is acquired only through applying their wisdom.

“We easily notice the mistakes of others,” Geronta Pavlos of Sinai says, “but we don’t see our own.”

In fact, the revealing indicator of a person’s spiritual level, according to the desert fathers, is his very own evaluation of it. While the beginner typically sees himself as close to God, the truly sanctified sees himself as very far away.

A young monk noticed that an elderly hermit monk in Mount Athos owned only a single book of spiritual direction, and questioned him on it. “Why should I have more books,” the elder replied, “when I haven’t yet done what this one says?”

Coming to know God by long practice in keeping His commandments, serious spiritual strugglers have some concept of how greatly fallen human nature differs from the ineffable divinity of the Holy Trinity.

Humility is not won in a day. But, is a negative thought really as bad as a negative action? Or, is this just another case of monks having too much time on their hands, and plaguing the rest of us with it?

A novice monastic was commanded by his geronta not to make an uncharitable comment to a certain individual. Somewhat awestruck by his superior, he complied. Thus, great was his bewilderment, when he subsequently found the geronta most gravely displeased with him for disregarding the injunction.

His warm protests of innocence failed to influence the geronta the smallest degree in his favor. Then, suddenly, he remembered. He had indeed addressed the forbidden words, and directly to their intended recipient – *in mind alone*.

A distinction of which the clairvoyant elder was completely unaware, having received “spiritual information” only that the comment was made.

Spoken aloud, or only in the mind – on that day at least – a thought, for God, was one and the same thing. ...

**Geronta Pavlos, what drew**

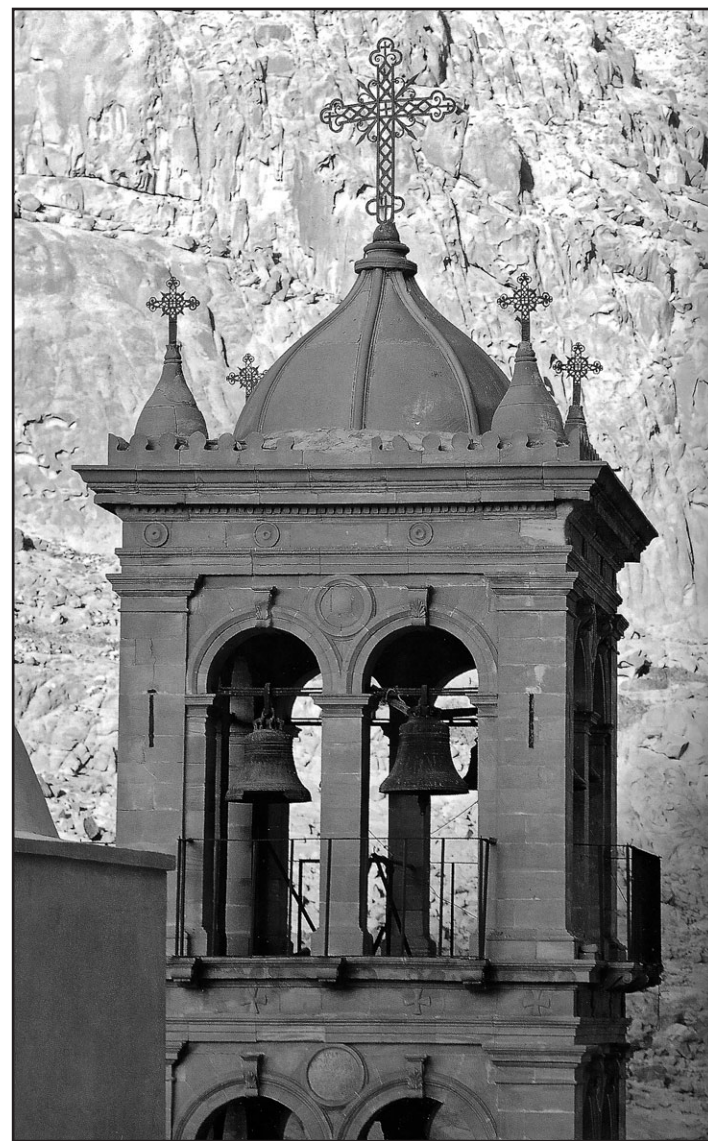


Photo by Bruce M. White Photography

**The Sinai Mountains echo the glory of God, resonating from some of the rare pre-revolutionary Russian bells surviving in the world today. The bells were brought to St. Catherine’s Monastery by 19th century Priestmonk Grigorios.**

As St. Catherine’s elected Dikaos, 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.

**you to the monastic life?**

Those things regarding the monastic life you can’t say, it’s something special. No explanation exists. You yourself, Sr. Joanna, can you say what it was in the world that helped you to choose the monastic life? A person can’t talk about these things, not that it’s wrong to. It is an inner strength mainly – God calls him to this road. The person wants it by himself, but also, God calls him. ...

**In the monastery, did you find what you were looking for?**

Look then, glory to God, I didn’t have a lot of demands. I saw when I arrived here that the fathers had love, they accepted me with love, and I didn’t split hairs beyond that, seeking many things. Lipon, and I stayed here. ... And now, glory to God, after so many years here I’ve never been

sorry for it.

**How many years?**

Since 1972. When I came here, Israel had the area of the Monastery of Sinai.

**When a person feels drawn to monasticism, how can he decide if it is really right for him?**

It’s a deep interior matter for someone to choose to become a monk. If he doesn’t want to, God on his part respects his freedom. If we don’t want it, He doesn’t force us.

**So he simply has to discern what he himself truly wants?**

Yes. And he should have the two callings, as we say, where God calls you, and you yourself want it. Both of those have to exist.

**And how can he know that he**

has both?

When he has both kinds of calling he doesn’t contemplate marriage. Even if faced with the best opportunity, offered a princess as wife, he has ruled it out.

**Is it possible one might really want monasticism, but not have the prerequisites?**

No, not if you really want it and you’ve proved so in action. Because one might think, “Yes I want to become a monk, but I also want to get married.” Both aren’t possible. But when you have a true, real calling, God wants you.

**Geronta, what can you tell us of the many years you have served St. Catherine’s?**

We who live here constantly experience the miracle that St. Catherine has done in keeping the monastery in life 1,400 years – from the time of St. Helena’s visit, 1,600 years – continuously! There is no other monastery or foundation in the world that has lived so many centuries in continuity. It is a miracle.

And indeed, in a desert environment without modern conveniences, which isn’t Christian, where the inhabitants follow another faith...

**Is it easier to pray in the desert?**

Certainly, because the stillness helps. The stillness is a great help, but if a person doesn’t have interior stillness, he can be in the desert and not pray. And he can be in the city and pray, if he has interior stillness, and he’ll have peace in his soul.

**Peace in reality – not just in words, according to St. Philotheos of Sinai ...**

If one is simple, humble and doesn’t judge the others ... interior stillness comes. If he becomes a child in his soul, as Christ said – unless you become like children, you won’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

**Geronta Paisios said an innocent child isn’t moved to judgment, even by negative appearances. He says the life of a person who lives this way is a constant celebration, whereas the person who gives in to bad thoughts cannot be helped by anyone – even God.**

The child has that quality where we all love him. It is not easy to hate a child. In the same way, no one can hate the Christian who has simplicity. We will imitate the child.

**But how is that possible, when we have so many kinds of knowledge, have studied so many things?**

It requires intelligence. The knowledge we learn at school is one thing, while the intelligence that God gives is another – the enlightenment of the mind.

Because, the things we know are so few, compared to those we don’t know. Our knowledge is so limited, compared to what’s happening in the universe around us. Lipon, in that case should we say we are wise? When we have something, it isn’t our own – God gave it to us.

**By your holy prayers, Geronta, may we always use our God-given intelligence to His glory, in order to enjoy real peace.**

## Religious Ed 101: Apostolic Succession

Have you ever wondered about some television preachers? Were they seminary-educated somewhere or did they merely start their own churches one day, declaring themselves reverends?

Deacons and priests of the Greek Orthodox Church must be ordained, through the sacrament of Holy Orders, by a bishop. (A bishop’s ordination, in turn, requires two bishops.) This sacrament goes back to the times of the Apostles, who essentially were the Church’s first bishops, themselves ordained by the Holy Spirit on the Church’s first day, known as Pentecost.

On that day, the Holy Spirit anoint-

ed the Apostles through tongues of fire hovering over their heads, gifting them with the ability to speak different languages, so as to spread the Word of God and establish churches. Pentecost took place 50 days after Christ’s Resurrection, and is also known as the “birthday” of the Church.

Other bishops, ordained by the Apostles, would follow in the course of spreading the faith. This sequential process of apostolic lineage and heritage, carried forth right up to today’s



hierarchs, is called Apostolic Succession.

The sacrament of Holy Orders involves only three levels of clergy: deacon, priest and bishop. Beyond these, other titles such as archbishop, metropolitan and patriarch, are offices conferred amongst clergy peers, via election. Their work includes overseeing the administrative and organizational leadership in ministries, which spans large expanses of Christian communities.

Apostolic Succession distinguishes Greek Orthodox clergy who, by

virtue of their ordination, take on the awesome mantle of responsibility to continue the Lord’s work, as was initiated by the Holy Spirit on that day of Pentecost, some 1,977 years ago.

Whenever the subject of “which is the true faith” comes up, a particular bumper sticker I once saw at Holy Cross Seminary comes to mind: “The Greek Orthodox Church ... Since 33 A.D.”

From the Sunday School 10th grade curriculum of the St. Athanasius Church, Arlington, Massachusetts; instructor George Makredes.