

Vasiliki Kouzari, an ascet of the world

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Vasiliki Kouzari was born in 1891 in Varosi, Famagusta,

in Cyprus, in what are now the Occupied Territories. Her family was very poor. She had another four siblings, though she herself was the youngest. She lost her mother when she was very young.

A man called Konstantinos Psaras, a widower with two children, asked to marry her sister Milia. Milia made it a condition of their marriage that she should bring with her her 10-year-old sister, Vasiliki, and he agreed.

Vasiliki brought up the two orphans and another seven children which her sister had with Konstantinos. All the children loved her more than they did their mother, because she loved them so much.

As a reward for her efforts with his children and family, Konstantinos bought a house for her in the centre of the town. He didn't separate her from his children and took care to give her a dowry so that she would be set up.

She was tall, good-looking, with long red plaits, white skin and lots of freckles.

She married Polyvios Paraskevas, from Lapithos, who was 13 years younger than her, though this was no obstacle, and they lived together in great affection.

She was very innocent by nature, naïve and good. Though she was poor, she was charitable. Whatever she received, she gave away as alms. She had deep faith in God and complete confidence in His providence. Before she was married, and afterwards, too, she loved to spend hours in church every day. She would sweep, light the lamps and pray. In the family and the village, they used to say, 'Vasilou [the Cypriot short form of her name] is a saint'. She never missed a service and observed all the fasts meticulously. She was humble, and asked the priests about everything. Whatever they advised, she accepted as God's will and observed it as such.

She didn't get angry and never lost her temper with anyone. She had no enemies and behaved with love towards everyone. She was ready to help, to give whatever was asked, even to the detriment of her family. If she saw someone getting angry and shouting, she became very upset: 'The poor thing', she'd say. 'What's the matter with them? Maybe they're not well'.

She was very humble. She didn't want other people to know and talk about her. Any good she did, she was careful to hide. She always told the truth. Her tongue was incapable of telling lies, even though this often cost her.

Apart from Konstantinos' nine children, Vasiliki brought up two of her own and then her grandchildren. It seems she was born to raise children. She got on very well with them, but then she did with everybody.

Although she was so good at so many things, Vasiliki also had a natural weakness or habit, which was that she talked too much. She talked so much that her talking became proverbial. If somebody else talked a lot, the others would say, 'Look, it's Vasilou'. On occasion she'd be talking so much she'd burn the food. Her husband would come home at lunchtime to eat and she would say to him in the sweetest of voices, 'Polyvako, I've burned the food. Can I fry you a couple of eggs?' He didn't remonstrate, he'd simply eat whatever there was and go back to work.

And though Vasiliki talked so much about Christ, Our Most Holy Lady, the Saints and her family, she never spoke badly about anyone. She was very strict about criticizing others, thought it a great sin and never judged what other people were doing. She used to say to her daughter, 'Androula, I'll never lay a hand on you

(and, in fact, she never did hit her children), but if I ever hear you saying something bad about another person, I'll smack your mouth'.

Her son loved a woman with three children, who was about ten years older than him. Vasiliki accepted her with great love and gave them her blessing, which supported them and so they prospered. She would say about her daughter-in-law: 'The good Lord sent her. She's very good'.

The presence of God was very intense and alive in her life. In her old age, she went on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. At one site, the others left her behind because she was so old. She went on by herself, walking easily and when the others expressed their surprise, she said that Our Lady was supporting her. The others remarked that she insisted that she felt a hand supporting her and that she walked easily.

She never went to a doctor. Her doctor was the Mother of God. If she fell ill, she would say to her son, 'Panayiotis, no doctor. Fetch me the Mother of God'. They carried her to the church of the Holy Girdle in Varosi. She would pray, they'd anoint her with oil and she'd go home on her own feet.

After they were uprooted in 1974, Vasiliki, her husband and the family of her son fled to the suburb of Polemidia in Lemessos. She lived there for four years and died in 1978 at the age of 87. All the children she'd raised gathered and buried her with great love. They also distributed a lot of money by way of alms, because at that time, due to the refugee problem, there was a lot of poverty.

Five years later, her husband died. In order to bury him, they opened her grave to take out her bones and they were all astonished. Vasiliki's dress and hair were untouched and her bones gave off a sweet aroma. This was confirmed by everyone who was present at the opening of her grave. Her son said to his sister, 'Androula, I'm not very close to the Church, but what can I say? When they opened our mother's grave, there was a sweet aroma'.

May her memory be eternal. Amen

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