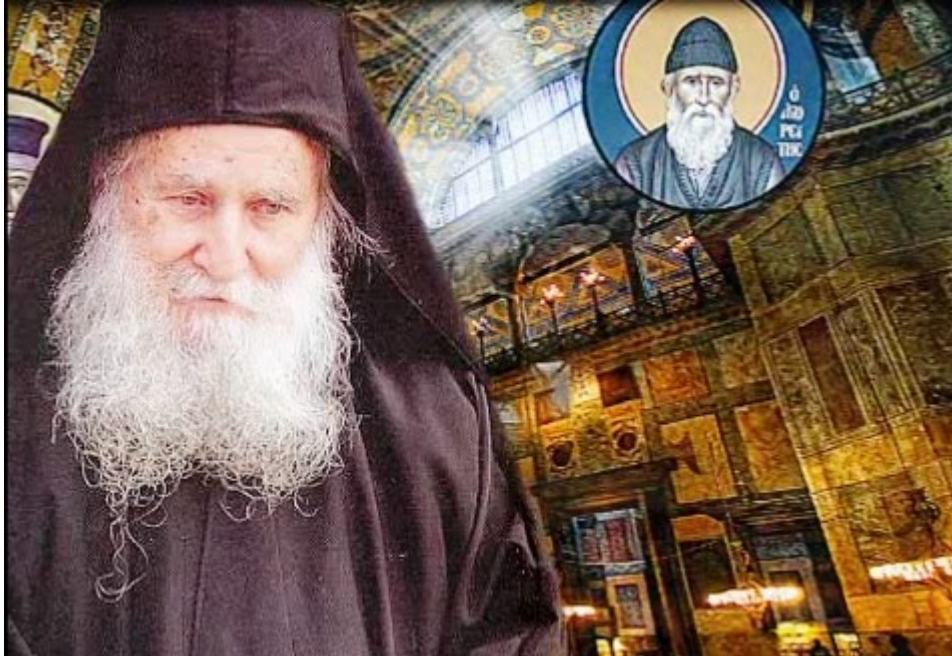


The humble mindset (Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

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St John Climax,

the guiding light and the crown of monasticism whose memory we are celebrating today, was renowned for his humility in addition to the other virtues beautifying his blessed soul.

One of the spirit bearing- holy fathers coming into ecstasy during the Saint's tonsure told his elder, Martyrios: 'Wow! Abba, did you know that today you have tonsured the Abbot of Sinai?'

In his absolute humility, the Saint never revealed anything about himself. The only thing we know about him is that he was sixteen years old when he entered monasticism. He stayed with his Elder some eighteen years and then he withdrew into deep desert for another forty years. He stayed there alone with his disciple Moses or perhaps with some others. In his old age, when he was over seventy, he was elected Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Sinai.

Being embellished with virtues, he strengthened monasticism and the entire region. He wrote his famous bible, the 'Climax' and left it as a legacy. Beginning with the virtue of abandoning the world, he wrote about all virtues up to impassion

and deification and ranked them in levels as if going up the stairs, step by step. He specifically recommends practicing the humble mindset as the most essential element and absolute duty of every Christian. In his biography it is said that the fathers wishing to test him, threw at him a piece of bread as if to a dog. The blessed Saint went on his hands and knees and picked it up proving that he had agreed to their test. Such were the spiritual heights he had reached.

I would like to refer to the issue of patience which being monks we ought to practice. I have already mentioned that the spiritual father 'saw' that Saint John was to become Abbot of Sinai. Nevertheless, when did this prediction become true? Fifty years later. This is crucial for us as it concerns from the start of our monastic life. Even though there is no one to tell us, our conscience and our deep faith constantly testify about it. What do they testify? They testify that we are definitely destined to accomplish our absolute success through the Lord's mercy, since we have been called to this kind of life. When will this happen? Will it happen at the end of our lives? No one knows how long we will live. We may live a long life. What we do know is this: 'He who has called us' is true to His promises and *'faithful in all his words'* (Psalms 145, 13). Therefore, He will give us the place He has prepared for us. However, we need to show patience for many years until this promise is fulfilled. This is how the Lord realizes His promises.

Let us now return to the issue of humility. Every virtue is beneficial and necessary since it elevates our personality which was disgraced by the fall and filled with blemishes. These stains must be blotted out one by one so that our 'image' returns to its earlier form and value. By 'blemishes' we mean the unnatural life. Namely passions and sins caused both by the fall and our sinful lives. Ever since we became aware of holiness, we have not been able to adhere to the Lord's wishes. We were not sinning only during the times we were ignorant. Unfortunately, we remained sinners even during the times of our awareness. The 'image' continues to remain in disgrace. We now ought to acquire virtues in the place of wickedness and passions through our humble effort and the essential assistance of the divine Grace. The virtues have precisely this purpose, namely to replace the deformed image. When we slowly revamp and restore the image to its former glory and condition, to its ancient simplicity, then our personality is revealed, testifying where we come from and whom we belong to. Of course we belong to our Father and we are named 'Christians' from our Christ.

Thus all virtues are useful, necessary and essential since each one uproots its respective evil and heals the appropriate wound. There is however, one virtue which alone may replace all others and restore the image to an unrivaled brilliance.

This virtue is recommended by the holy fathers. This is not surprising since it is the precise, genuine attribute of our Father, our Jesus. He became man for our sake, not because He needed it but because of the fullness of His all-love towards man. He did not issue orders from afar. Instead, He took upon Himself the human nature, lived amongst us and taught us practically step by step how to proceed through the acquisition of virtues and the eradication of evil.

He also wished to tell us something on top of all these. 'Do you want me to tell you who I am? *'Learn from me that I am gentle and humble in heart' (Matthew 11, 29)*'. The great mystery has now been revealed. We have not only learnt how He looks like but have also found out the depths of His heart, the centre of His existence. This is our Lord and our Father!

Is there anyone who wishes to acquire this inheritance, which will enable him to cast aside all obstacles and restrictions and fall into the Father's bosom with glory and courage? He who is clever enough will try to acquire the fullness of the Father's character even from this life. Such a person is the humble one.

Is humility something natural or is it beyond our nature and difficult to even understand?

What is humility? Humility is the reality. Do we really need to employ any special means to see how things really are with us and that we are unworthy and wretched and incapable of any goodness in our miserable lives? I do not think so. If we hear about our ancestry from the Scriptures and compare it with our present condition, we will immediately feel embarrassed. We hear that according to the Lord's providence we were created in a special way from the beginning 'in His image and likeness'. According to His divine wish we were created gods 'by grace', like Him who is God in essence. This is our lineage but we have become 'the robbers' den' instead. Wickedness, criminality, deceit and all kinds of evil roam freely inside us and we differ from the beasts only externally. This is the truth. Therefore from this point we may begin to acquire humility. Having realized that we are wretched indeed, we maintain this mindset and remain peaceful. How is it possible to be mad at someone if we persevere in this frame of mind? How is it possible for someone with such humble character to be thinking about greed, stealing, revenge and other wickedness? This will never happen. And again, isn't it fitting that such a wretched man suffers hardship rather than glory?

I have mentioned all these in order to give you an opportunity to grasp how easy it is to hold on to this task and to begin outperforming each other on the virtue of humility. Competition is permitted in this respect. *'It is always good to be zealous in a good cause'* (Galatians 4, 18).

Behold! There is another reason for our humbleness. When the time came for Lord Word to incarnate, He ripped off the manuscript with our dues, raised 'the image' from the deep and sealed it with His bloodstained fingers. He restored it to its ancient beauty and bestowed on it the clout of adoption. We received this trophy during our baptism but again we fell back to our old ways i.e. to wretchedness beyond limits and description.

Is it too hard for us to hold on to these thoughts and strive to acquire the mother of all virtues which is the genuine attribute of our Father, which makes even the angels withdraw when they see it? Even the burning sword would have departed as soon as it came face to face with humility had it not been abolished by the Cross of our Jesus. How can it stand when the sons of the father walk through boldly to inherit the promises made to them?

Remembering today's celebrated Saint but mostly our Jesus- *'the founder and perfecter of our faith'* (Hebrews 12, 2), our prototype and the leader of our salvation- let us continue with the struggle at hand and let us rest assured that our success is certain. Amen.

Source: Translated by Olga Konari Kokkinou from the Greek edition: Γέροντος Ιωσήφ Βατοπαιδινού, Διδαχές από τον Άθωνα, Εκδόσεις 'Το Άγιον Όρος', Θεσσαλονίκη , 1989.