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Testimony from Mount Athos, Prologue

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PROLOGUE

“And God said: Let us make man in our image and in our likeness”. (Gen1,26)

Man has been looking for the truth and for the path which leads to it ever since the ancient times..

The ancient, eminent Greek Philosopher, Plato, stresses in his writings that man has to become similar to God: *“That is why we should make all haste to take flight from this world to the other, and that means becoming like the divine so far as we can, and that again is to become righteous or just with the help of wisdom”.*(Plato, *Theaetetus (Θεαίτητος) 176a—e (ca. 395 BCE)(transl. after F.M. Cornford).*

However, this happened through the advent of the Lord Word (Logos) on

earth, since He “The Word became flesh and lived among us” (John 1,14) and to all those who received him “he gave the right to become children of God” (John.1.12). He Himself, our Saviour, taught us the art of becoming deified by passing over to us his divine commandments. It is well known that the first people who have received those commandments are the Holy Apostles. Having diligently obeyed the Lord’s commandments, they have roamed the world and taught them to “all nations”.

The holy Apostles, in order to safely and effectively assist their spiritual children, have burdened themselves with handing over the revealed truth in writing as it is found in the Gospels and the epistles. This same thing has been happening in every generation: the spiritual fathers have been passing on their experienced truth of the Gospel through their writings also.

Behold, almost two thousand years since the birth of Christ, the Lord “has not left himself without testimony”(Acts 14,17). Many venerable Elders, in accordance with the most holy patristic tradition and because of their own fervor and concern for the salvation of their own spiritual children and for the entire Church, they struggle to strengthen those of us, who happen to be living during the end of time, through words and deeds in our “ worthy struggle”.

Our venerable Elder, Joseph monk, had this fine objective in mind. After more than half a century of living the monastic life and experience and having had the exceptional blessing of the Mother of God to place himself under the authority of the great ascetic of our times, the blessed Elder Joseph the Hesychast, he handed over these writings as a living “testimony from Mount Athos” to all those who wish to hear “words of eternal life”, while revealing to us the particulars of the spiritual law.

Our blessed Elder regards every person as able to reach the faith of the revealed truth through reasoning. It is through this faith and through personal effort to keep the commandments, that fear of God comes to one as a heavenly gift and as the commencement and the foundation of repentance. The fear of God leads one to comprehensive self restraint at the onslaught of every sinful tendency and every passion.

Sincere repentance is distinguished by the observance of all commandments, the long term perseverance in prayer and the enduring patience ‘unto the very end’ in the face of all temptations. It is also manifested by the willing bracing of one’s cross, the self denial, the love of hard work, the “emptying” (kenosis) of oneself down to the depths of humility and by mourning and the hot tears which bubble up

because of it; these are states which lead towards the Love of God, holy illumination and generally towards the likeness of God.

Our venerable Elder is trying «with all his might” to reveal to us the reasons why we are facing temptations in this world. He examines those reasons and especially the ways in which we can ‘empty’ ourselves, as well as the sweet taste which is derived from divine grace.

He explains how pain entered our lives and how one can deal with it in accordance with orthodox practices through legitimate trials, so that “the spiritual pleasure of divine gifts and divine eros” will finally grow within us. In addition, he insists on caution in the face of all kinds of delusions, since “ the enemy may imitate the state of contemplation and grace quite a lot”. Finally, through inwardness and discretion, one may reach with the assistance of grace the goal of divine promises as well as the very divine love; since “God is love”.(A John, 4,16) . And as a genuine and thankful son, he will return to God what belongs to God in all judgement.

We glorify the Triune God and we offer not a few thanks to our Lady, the Mother of God, who is the protector of our Holy and Great Monastery of Vatopedi and the Overseer of Mount Athos, because we are able, through the writings of our venerable Elder Joseph, to offer those who are not only looking for a good word, but also look at Holy Mount Athos, the contemporary “Testimony from Mount Athos” , the second book in our newly launched publication series “ Vatopedi Publications Beneficial to the soul” .

We believe that this book: “Testimony from Mount Athos” will become every monk’s manual as well as every Christian’s who fervently pursues the salvation of his immortal soul.

We are deeply thankful to our Lady Mother of God and we humbly ask for her intercession in favor of all those who have helped towards the present publication.

The Abbot of the Great and Holy Monastery of Vatopedi

Archimandrite Efrem.

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