

14 Ιουλίου 2017

## Archimandrite Ioakeim Spetsieris, New Skete, Mt Athos - Part I

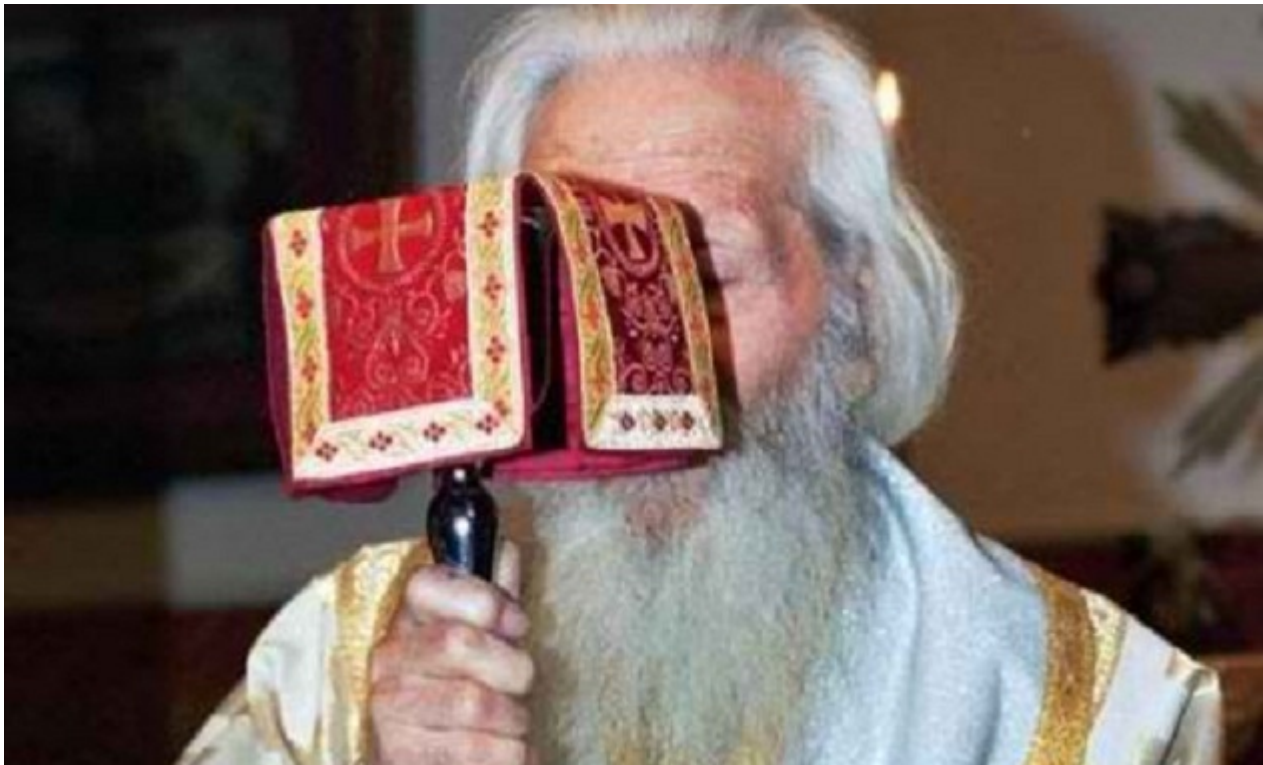
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Archimandrite Ioakeim Spetsieris, New Skete, (September 1943)

Anecdotes from his life

\* His grandfather was a married priest called Ioannis. When Fr. Ioakeim, (Ioannis in the world) was born, his grandfather foretold that he would have his name, that is Ioannis, and become a priest. This grandfather had such virtue that he even had foreknowledge of his death. At the end of a liturgy he came to the Royal Doors and told the congregation: "This was my last liturgy". He went to his daughter's, who was married and they gave him a coffee. And there he told them: "That's the last time in my life I'll drink coffee".



\* Ioakeim (Ioannis Spetsieris in the world) came from Kefallonia. His father was a farmer and a very spiritual man. While he was working, he would sing various

hymns. He particularly liked those of the Honourable Cross: "Cross, the guardian of the whole world...and wound of the demons". One night, the accursed one became angry with him and struck him badly on the leg. Although he didn't fall ill, he asked for a spiritual father, and when he'd confessed, said to him: "On such and such a day, come and give me communion, because I'll be dying". He had foreknowledge of his death three days before it happened. Father Ioakeim was away from the house and the relatives were all for letting him know, so that he could get back. His father told them, however: "Don't do anything. He won't get back in time".

\* At the age of about 18, Ioakeim went to the Holy Mountain. He walked from Thessaloniki to get to the "Bower of Our Lady". He passed by Vatopaidi, where they wanted him to stay. But he didn't do so, because of scandal that occurred.

\* From Vatopaidi, Fr. Ioakeim went to New Skete, and in particular to the house of the Holy Unmercenary Doctors, one of the oldest in New Skete, which is dedicated to the Birth of the Mother of God. It may be that he knew the elders there, Elder Christoforos and Fr. Sinesios.

\*Fr. Christoforos had lived the common life in the Monastery of Koutloumousiou and was very strict. He would send Fr. Ioakeim to work all day on the construction of an aqueduct. At night, when Fr. Ioakeim was reading the Minaio (the book with the saints' days and services for the month) or the psalter, he would fall asleep from weariness. Then the elder would take the book and tap him affectionately on the back and say:

"Die, and you'll go to heaven".

\*At a young age, Fr. Ioakeim contracted tuberculosis, which was then a dangerous disease. One Saturday, the elders went to the cemetery and left him alone in the house. Fr. Ioakeim entreated Our Lady to intercede, to allow him to depart this life and not wear out his elders any more. The Mother of God then came to him. She appeared from the waist up, while from the waist down she was engulfed in flames. She told him: "Whoever hopes in me will not be afraid in this life or the next".

\* Fr. Ioakeim and his disciple Fr. Theofylaktos once went to the Holy Monastery of Saint Paul's [the mother monastery of New Skete] for the feast of the Reception of Christ (Candlemas), when the Monastery celebrates. At the time, the holy Metropolitan of Militoupolis, Ierotheos was staying on the Holy Mountain. At the Divine Liturgy, at the point of the sanctification of the Honourable Gifts, Fr. Ioakeim saw a brightness, like the light from a floodlight, coming from the cupola and covering the Gifts. He told his disciple, with strict instructions not to let it be

known anywhere as long as he (Fr. Ioakeim) lived.

\* Fr. Ioakeim enjoyed a good relationship with Yermanos, Metropolitan of Volos. He would often go to his diocese, where he preached and heard confessions. One devout lady, called Andromache, whom a holy ascetic called Tabitha and Mother of the Poor, because of her alms-giving (she later became a nun and was renamed Martha, and gave the facts for the composition of the biography of Papa-Planas), told Fr. Theofylaktos, the disciple of Fr. Ioakeim: "One time, the Elder was celebrating the liturgy in Saint Nicholas' in Volos and I happened to be there. At the time of the Great Entrance, I saw that he wasn't treading on the ground".

\* When his disciple did not take communion, he would not allow him to read the Thanksgiving Prayers. He said: "I took communion, so I should read the prayers". At one Divine Liturgy, when he'd finished and was getting ready to come out of the sanctuary, he was overcome with tears. His disciple went into the sanctuary, misunderstood and said: "Elder, why are you crying? Have I done something to upset you without knowing?"

"No, son," he replied. "I was just remembering Our little Lady". Perhaps he had seen something and wanted to conceal it.

He had great reverence for the Mother of God and often used to address her as "My pet Lady, my little Lady".

\* After the service, they would read the supplicatory canon to the Mother of God and, when he'd said the dismissal, he would tell his disciple: "Make a cup of coffee now, Fr. Theofylaktos, with the blessing of our little Lady" He could get through the whole day with a coffee and a little bread. He had great restraint. He drank water only at table. Some would say to him: "Elder, do you also fast from water?" He forbade his disciple to drink water after Compline. He told him: "Be patient and you'll get your reward. How did the fathers manage?"

\* He always read the services in church, even in the winter, without lighting a stove. "There were times" says Fr. Theophylaktos, "when my feet were numb with cold. And the elder would comfort me, saying: 'Son, the holy fathers used to pray on the top of columns and we want heat in the house? We've got the money to buy wood, but it's good to tax the body a little'".

\* He was very strict as regards his spiritual duties. He was particularly keen on clear reading and harmonious singing. He sang slowly and read slowly, with compunction. One time in the *Kyriako* [the main church in a skete] a monk was reading quickly and he checked him: "Why are you reading quickly? You're praying

here”.

He would tell his disciple: “Don’t read quickly, because you’ll ruin your tongue and get used to being in a hurry”.

\* In one of the houses in New Skete, there was a monk who, with the co-operation of the evil one, envied Fr. loakeim. Every time Fr. loakeim left his house, as soon as this monk saw him from a distance, he would start swearing at him: “You’re deceived, you’re accursed, cardinal” and so on. Fr. loakeim never said anything. A monk went to Fr. loakeim and told him that the other monk was always criticizing him. Fr. loakeim told him in no uncertain terms: “I won’t allow you to speak ill of my benefactor”, and showed him the door. This monk went straight away to the other one and told him what had happened. The latter came to his senses, repented, went to Fr. loakeim, made a prostration to him and asked forgiveness. From then on he went regularly to Fr. loakeim. So, with his forbearance, he triumphed and helped a brother to become free of his passion.

\* One time at a feast in New Skete, the *Dikaios* [the elected head of the skete] told him to take off his vestments and not to take part in the Divine Liturgy. Fr. loakeim was not put out at all, did what he was told, sat in one of the stalls and followed the Liturgy calmly. Thereafter he went to the meal which the *Dikaios* provided and ate as though nothing had happened. That’s how far his tolerance and patience went.

\* Fr. loakeim served in Halkida as a preacher. A woman from there told his disciple once: “My son was taking exams to get into the Military Academy. I went to Fr. loakeim and asked him to pray for my son to pass. He answered ‘At this very moment when you’re asking me, your son’s already passed’. And he had”.

\* He was a preacher in Corinth for eight years. Two girls who confessed to Fr. loakeim went one evening to see him and he told them much that was beneficial for their souls. It got late and Fr. loakeim lit a lamp. There were no lights. While they were talking, they saw a dove on the shoulder of Fr. loakeim! This was confirmed to his disciple, Fr. Theofylaktos, by one of the girls who saw it.

\* When they sang “More honourable”, he didn’t cense the icons, as is the norm, but left the censer underneath the icon of Our Lady. When they were singing the praises of the Mother of God, he didn’t want to go round the church censuring the icons.

\* A female student tried to get married to a male student who was intending to become an unmarried priest. Fr. loakeim advised him to be careful. The girl found out and went to the elder and started to castigate him. At one point, when she was

really angry, she said: “Even if it sticks in your craw, I’m going to have him”. No sooner had she got back home than she fell seriously ill, close to death. As soon as her mother found out why, she hurried to find Fr. Ioakeim and took him to the house. The Elder was happy to go, read prayers, forgave her, and she made a full recovery.

\* There was one time Fr. Ioakeim was celebrating the liturgy at the church of the Bodiless Powers, in the Holy Monastery of Petraki. During the liturgy, a deacon, who had taken no part in the sacrament and was outside the sanctuary, went inside and started criticizing Fr. Ioakeim rather fiercely. The Elder replied calmly: “Deacon, my son, it looks to me as though you’re not too steady on your feet” . The deacon turned to leave the sanctuary, fell and broke his leg. When the liturgy was over, Fr. Ioakeim went to see how the lad was doing. The deacon asked him: “Elder, did you curse me?”. “No, son,” replied Fr. Ioakeim, “but how could you dare to do that, in the sanctuary, at the time of the Divine Liturgy, when the angels themselves are trembling?”.

\* Whatever bad things people did to him, he never reacted badly. He always bore in mind: “Bless, do not curse” (*Rom. 12, 14*). If anyone upset him, they were the first he remembered at the preparation prayers before the liturgy.

\* There was once a monk who castigated Elder Ioakeim without any real reason. While the man was being so rude to him, the elder did not reply at all. When the monk left, Fr. Ioakeim said to Fr. Theofylaktos: “What did I do that he should speak to me like that, son?”.

When the monk got back to his own house, he fell over the front step and hurt his leg badly. When he came to, he wanted to get to the Monastery of Saint Paul. On the way, he came across a mule that never kicked. On the contrary, it was really gentle. The monk went up to it, suspecting nothing, and was rewarded with a strong kick on the same leg he had injured falling over the step.

\* The elder once wanted to go somewhere by boat. As he went up the ramp, another passenger started mocking him. “We’ve got a priest with us. Things’ll turn out badly today”. Fr. Ioakeim answered: “Everything will be fine, except you”. In a little while the man felt dizzy and tripped over himself, clumsily. They picked him up and, when he recovered, he made a prostration to the elder and asked his forgiveness.

\* A woman from Athens once asked the elder to pray for her to have a child, because she was infertile. “I’ll go to the Holy Mountain, I’ll pray and I’ll write to

you”, he told her. And in fact he prayed intensely for three weeks about it- when people asked him about something, it often took three weeks before he came up with an answer- and then he wrote to the woman; “You won’t have a child, because you won’t bring it up in a proper Christian way and its soul will be condemned. That’s why God won’t give you a child. That’s what I’ve been told through my prayer”.

\* It happened once that the elder was going somewhere by boat and the captain left his post to be with some loose women. The elder was upset and worried over this. Soon an terrible bang was heard: the engine had blown up. At first they thought they’d hit a rock. Later they were gradually able to pull in and anchor in Stylida and the journey was cancelled.

\* Fr. Ioakeim often celebrated the liturgy in the Amalieio, in Athens, where Queen Olga used to go to church. He got to know the queen and often went to the palace. The queen wanted Fr. Ioakeim to become a bishop and to send him to Russia.

Source: The Brotherhood of Archimandrite Spyridon Xenou, New Skete.