

Archimandrite Ioakeim Spetsieris, New Skete, Mt Athos - Part II

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In Athens, Fr. Ioakeim used to stay at the dependency of the Holy Sepulchre. One woman, who kept losing children, after the last time, had despaired, even of the doctors. She heard of the elder, went to find him and fell at his feet, begging him to pray. The elder went at once to the church of the Holy Unmercenaries, which is at the dependency of the Holy Sepulchre, and gave her the relics of the Unmercenary Doctors, saying: "Hold them over yourself". Then he read various prayers, prayed and said to her: "Don't worry, you'll have a child". And, indeed, she did. The woman was overjoyed and asked for a photograph of the elder to have at home as a blessing and protection.



* One time, the elder was going to Piraeus by boat when a great storm blew up and the captain became afraid. The passengers, particularly the women and children,

were crying. Panic stations. The elder went down into the ship, found a corner and lay down. When he'd done so, he saw a dove flying above him, saying "Go to sleep". "Yes". "But I'll keep watch and protect you. Go and tell that crew that everyone will get to Piraeus safely and nobody will be hurt". The elder went up and encouraged the passengers. And, indeed, they all got to port safe and sound.

* One Great Lent, the elder wanted to leave the Holy Mountain to hear confessions. In those days, transportation was difficult. He sent his disciple to the nearby skete of Saint Ann to tell the captain that, on the way to Dafni, he should stop off at the pier of New Skete to pick up the elder. But the captain didn't want to and headed off to Dafni. The elder turned to his disciple and confirmed to him: "I'll be leaving today. I asked Our Lady and she told me so". Fr. Theofylaktos said to himself: "What's the elder talking about? How's he going to leave when there's no transport? How will he go?". Soon a ship came to New Skete from Skopelos, bringing oil and wine. The captain was an acquaintance of the elder. Every time he came to New Skete, he had to visit the elder and get his blessing. The same this time. He went up to the house with the others and the elder gave them the usual coffee, raki and so on. And he left with them the same day.

* Whenever Fr. Ioakeim wanted to do anything, he would ask the Mother of God first, and the Holy Unmercenaries. He would not do anything without their blessing. Once, Fr. Chrysostomos (a monk of New Skete who died in 1975) went to Fr. Ioakeim and asked him to come and celebrate the liturgy at his chapel.

"Father Chrysostomos", he said, "I'll ask the Holy Unmercenaries and if they give me permission, I'll come". So he went and stood in front of the icon of the saints and prayed. Then he turned to Fr. Chrysostomos and said: "I'll come. The saints have given me a blessing".

* He once went to a house in the Skete to celebrate the liturgy. When they'd finished, he said to his disciple: "I'm not coming here again to celebrate. I saw a bad sign".

What he saw, he didn't say. The elder of that cell- it was at the time of the change of the calendar- was always condemning priests and bishops.

* Another elder went to Elder Ioakeim and was scathing in his criticism of the change of calendar. In fact, he expressed himself very coarsely. Fr. Ioakeim put up with him a number of times, but one day said to his disciple, Fr. Theofylaktos, "Please show the elder to the door". From then on, the man never went back to Fr. Ioakeim's house. In such cases, the elder employed the verse from the psalms: "I

have expelled him who speaks privily against his neighbour" (Ps. 100, 5).

* Fr. Ioakeim didn't speak much. And he never judged anyone. He spent his time with services, study, prayer and writing. He didn't go to other houses, except on rare occasions. He was serious. One day a monk went to the house of Fr. Ioakeim and jokingly called his disciple "Abbas". When this had happened a few times, he said: "Both of you ask forgiveness and don't let it happen again, or I'll give you a penance. Monks don't need jokes".

* He used to say: "A monk that isn't humble won't see the face of God".

* He would come across difficult situations as a confessor. He was strict in his observance of the canons. One time, a monk from an idiorhythmic monastery came to him for confession. Before the confession, he asked him: "Do you have beardless young men at the monastery? Do you eat meat?". When the monk replied in the affirmative, he said: "On your way, I won't take you on. Those two things are enough to send you to hell".

* In New Skete, there wasn't a vigil in the *Kyriako* for the 15th of August, because the house of the Dormition of the Mother of God celebrated and the vigil was held there. In Fr. Ioakeim's day, there were 80-100 fathers in the skete, enough for two vigils. While Fr. Ioakeim was asleep an angel appeared to him and showed him around the sketes and monasteries of the Holy Mountain. He said to him: "Do you see? Here they're holding all-night vigils in honour of the Mother of God, and they're holding one here, as well. Why aren't you?".

Then he showed him monks from New Skete cutting wood and carrying it off somewhere. And he added: "They can work, but they can't do the vigil". The following year, he held a vigil at the *Kyriako* at his own expense and so there were two vigils for the 15th of August at New Skete.

* One time he was in Athens, at the dependency of the Holy Sepulchre and he dealt successfully with a difficult situation:

A young girl, the daughter of a secretary at an embassy, had illicit relations with a grocer and decided to commit suicide. She was thinking of throwing herself into a well they had at their home, but hesitated. In the end, she decided to go to Faliro and drown herself. On the way, she remembered Fr. Ioakeim and thought she might first go by and see him and then put her plan into effect. So she went and, by God's providence, found Fr. Ioakeim, and told him her intentions. Fr. Ioakeim told her: "Sit there and I'll be back". He quickly ran to the church of the Holy Unmerceneries and made a fervent prayer for the soul in danger. Then he went back to the girl and

said: "You'll do as I tell you". "Father I'm going to drown myself. I won't listen to you". The elder advised her: "Go to his mother and tell her that, as of today, you're her daughter". So she went and obediently did what Fr. Ioakeim had told her to. The grocer's mother was so moved that she said: "I'm not worthy to have such a daughter". (The girl was educated and knew several languages). The elder's prayers brought heaven down to earth and overcame every obstacle. The young man came home in the evening and they decided to get married.

One day, years later, Fr. Ioakeim was walking along a street in Athens when he heard a voice calling his name. He turned and saw a woman coming to meet him, saying: "Don't you recognize me? I'm the one who wanted to drown herself and you saw me. That's my husband and that's my child!".

The elder's prayers were so powerful that they could raise people from the dead, as far as their psychology was concerned.

*In Lamia, there was a church warden who couldn't stand Fr. Ioakeim. On the eve of one feast, a Sunday, he said to him: "I'm not going to let you preach tomorrow. When you start your sermon, I'll send round the plate". And, indeed, when Fr. Ioakeim went up into the pulpit, the warden grabbed the plate and started going round the church, imagining that he'd stop the elder speaking. Just then, up in the pulpit, Fr. Ioakeim said in a loud voice: "Let the impious leave the church. I'll not leave the pulpit. I'll stay here until this evening, saying that the ungodly should leave the church" After this phrase had been repeated a few times, the warden couldn't stand it any longer and took the plate and put it back where it belonged. Then the elder continued his homily.

* A monk once went to him for confession and he had money in a savings account. He chastised him: "You're a monk and you've got money in a savings account?". In general, he would never allow people to buy lottery tickets and the like.

*The then Bishop of Gytheio and Oitylo sent a letter to the Holy Synod, requesting that some parts of the Divine Liturgy be cut. When Elder Ioakeim heard of it, he sent him a letter, in which he criticized him caustically. Among other things he said:

"You seven-month-old"- the bishop was very short in stature- "who do you think you are? The liturgy was written by luminaries and pillars of the Church, so who are you to mess about with it?".

Later, the bishop met Fr. Ioakeim and asked him: "Elder, are you the one who wrote to me about the abbreviations of the Divine Liturgy I'd proposed in a letter to the Holy Synod?".

"I am", he said, and told him off, telling the truth without fear. The Metropolitan gave him several arguments which, in his view, were in favour of abbreviating the Divine Liturgy: the fact that the congregation gets tired; that the preachers of the Gospel would then have more time at their disposal. Fr. Ioakeim answered: "If people get tired in the Liturgy, it'd be better if they didn't come to church, rather than cutting the Liturgy short for their sake".

* When his end was nigh, he said to his disciple: "Better that I die, son, rather than see the evil that betides the Church".

* As a student at the Rizareio School, Fr. Ioakeim had Saint Nektarios as principal. When the saint built a monastery on Aegina, Fr. Ioakeim would often visit him. Even after the saint had departed this life, he would go to his grave and pray with his chaplet (the black, woollen "rosary" of the Orthodox). He sensed fragrance from the tomb.

Once, Fr. Ioakeim got on a ship from Piraeus to go to the saint's grave, to pay his respects and pray, as was his wont. For some reason best known to himself, the captain thought he was a bishop, so he hoisted the flag. As they approached Aegina he sounded the ship's horn. Priests and laity gathered to welcome the bishop. But there wasn't one and the priests were at a loss to understand why the captain had done this. Fr. Ioakeim told them: "Don't be upset. This happened because it's the last time I'll be coming here to pay my respects at the grave of Saint Nektarios and he wanted to honour me in this way".

And it was, indeed, the last time that Fr. Ioakeim visited the saint's monastery. The war came, he fell ill and he never went back.

In Great Lent, 1943, Fr. Ioakeim fell ill with heart failure. It was difficult for him to get down to the *Kyriako* for Great Week. His disciple told him to rest at home.

"No", he said, "I'll come. I might not live another year to celebrate these days".

The summer was sweltering. His feet swelled. He realized he was on his way to Jerusalem Above. In his sleep, he said the Salutations

“I’m going to die”, he said to Fr. Theofylaktos one day. “My soul’s saying the Salutations”.

On the eve of his death, in September 1943, he saw Saint Nektarios in his sleep and again told his disciple he was about to depart. In a few days, he fell asleep in the Lord.

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