

Elder Ioannis Kalaïdis (1) (Protopresbyter Georgios Trapezanlides)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



Introduction

In the Gospel of Saint Matthew, the disciples and, by extension, all Christians who desire to live in accordance with the word of God are called by the Lord, the light and salt of the earth, and also a city built on a hill which is visible on all sides. He stresses the world-saving dimensions of such a way of life, which arises from the connection of the life of the person with that of God and is the fruit of our free will and co-operation the Tri-Substantial God Who moves us- Who makes us like Him and changes us from mortals into gods by grace. Through this participation and their fine, virtuous lives filled with good works, Christians should evolve into magnets attracting others away from deceit and towards the truth, from the darkness of sin to the light of life, so that they can return to true life and render proper glory to the only true God.



One such city, built so high that it could not escape the attention of other people, but drew them to it, in order to offer them rest and such a light that would illumine the world, which wanders in the darkness, and such salt that would bring healing to the septic wounds that sin brings to people, was the late Elder Ioannis from Neokhori. This fine elder of our times shone with his life in the Holy Spirit in our much-troubled generation which, on its way through its own desert, is being tested in our crisis- and pain-laden days, far from God.

Childhood and Youth

Father Ioannis Kalaïdis was born in Kamaroto, Serres, of God-fearing parents, Chrystostomos and Theodora, on 8 May 1925, on the feast of Saint John the Theologian. He was therefore given the name of the evangelist beloved by Our Lord, Ioannis, an action which illustrates the fear of God and also the love that his parents had for the Church and its saints.

An important role in setting him on the right spiritual path was played by his mother, who was a woman of faith in and love for God and His Church. Theodora wanted her children to have God within them, and so she guided them in prayer and in regular attendance at church. This God-fearing woman was originally from Asia Minor, from Olympus in Bithynia. In Byzantine times, this mountain was the setting for the birth of a flourishing monastic state, equal in spiritual stature to the Thebaïd in Egypt or the Athonite state on the Holy Mountain, and it gave our Church a host of saints, ascetics and martyrs. In the tumultuous years of the

iconoclast struggle, the monasteries were a beacon and stronghold of Orthodox faith and practice. This spirituality influenced the people of the region right down to the time of Ioannis' mother, Theodora. And so, after the Asia Minor disaster, when these people were uprooted from the land of their fathers and lost their material possessions, they were yet able to retain within themselves the spiritual riches they had come to know.

The Elder had great love for his mother, was excessively fond of her, and so from an early age on Kamaroto, Serres, he became the recipient of the spiritual instincts she herself had inherited and, from these instincts, there grew within him respect and love for God.

The Elder's childhood differed from the life of other children in that their priority was playing games, as was only natural. He himself was serious, however, and loved to go to church and stay inside it. He loved the life of the celebrant and wished to serve God in the same sacred capacity one day. He wished to become a priest, to belong to Christ's clergy and to tend the same flock of reasoning sheep for which Christ gave His blood and life in a sacrifice to His Heavenly Father. He used to say: *"As far as I remember, I used to go to church regularly and help the priest in the altar. And I would say that I wanted the good Lord to find me worthy of becoming a priest and serving Him. And the good Lord, Who hears all things, gave heed to my childhood prayer"*.

The Elder served in the Greek Army from 28 October 1947 to 20 March 1950. It was a very difficult time for Greece, since it coincided with the period when the already much-tormented Greek nation was also riven by the miseries of the civil war (1946-9). Father Ioannis loved his homeland very much and was greatly saddened by the violent pain the Greek nation was experiencing. He would say: *"Brothers were handing over their brothers to be killed. A terrible thing"*. Seeing fear and death reigning everywhere, he was in great pain and could not bear to see other people suffering. He himself was often at risk, and escaped certain death. The thrall of death and the absence of love shook the Elder deeply and so he had recourse to prayer for an end to the misery, for a cessation of hostilities, for God's preservation for himself and other people and for the reign of peace among the Greek nation. Once when he was praying, he was granted a wonderful revelation: when he was saying the prayer of the heart in his barrack room, he saw the living Lord, as He is pictured in our churches in the icon of the Pantokrator, the Lord of All, and heard the voice of Christ soothing him. And he was, indeed, protected on more than one occasion by divine providence, as he himself recounts: *"I thank the good Lord Who encouraged me and brought me safely out of the fire of war"*. In August 1949, the

civil war came to an end, and, once he had been demobbed, he returned safe and sound to his village and the bosom of his family.

He was a pious man, faithful to God, simple, quiet, polite to everyone, hard-working and shy. His return to his village was not merely a return to his father's house, to his parents, whom he honoured and respected, but also a return to the Church, which he had missed during his military service, and this had troubled him. While he was working in the fields, he never failed to get to church on Sundays, to study Scripture and to read the Christian publications of his time.

In 1955, at the age of 30, untouched by bodily sin, he entered the legal state of matrimony with a lady called Polyxeni, with whom he had this first three children, Theodora, Christos and Sophia. The difficulties of family life did not hinder him in his spiritual duties. In any case, he could not live away from the Church and the divine liturgy and demonstrated great zeal to be in church, to stand before God and to pray for the salvation of himself and all other people. Temptation was not long in coming, however. Many other Christian people who saw him going to church with such eagerness, despite his daily fatigue from his work in the fields, began to bother him to such an extent that they forced him to go on the quiet and have thoughts of slackening his regular church attendance. When he was in the church and conferring with these thoughts, he received a divine indication not to abandon his holy custom, but to continue going to church. He heard this voice three times in his life and wept bitterly because he felt he had saddened the Lord and betrayed Him as the apostle Peter had done. From that time on, he never again entertained such thoughts, but always took great care not to sadden the Lord, not only in his words and deeds, but also in his thoughts. He knew full well that the evil spirit first tries to seduce people away from the divine life by giving them thoughts and then attempts to do so with their bodies. And so he began the task of holy vigilance and did not neglect his church attendance. He omitted attending the liturgy only twice, as an enlisted man, when, because of his military duties, he was unable to fulfill his favourite task. Indeed, at the time, he made strong overtures to his superiors, requesting that he be allowed to continue his blessed custom, which was so well-pleasing to God, and warned them that the next time he would not comply with daily orders if they prevented his attendance at church. Until 1970, he served the church as sexton, parish councilor and chanter, always retaining the feeling that he had not offered the church anything at all. He had humility in his heart, not merely in his words and this humility accompanied him all the days of his life. And so, with such a life, the time eventually was ripe for him to become a priest.

Priest of the Most High

At the start of 1970, on 3 January, he had a strange dream, as he was fond of telling, especially to other clergymen, in order to emphasize that the priesthood is a gift from God: *I saw His Eminence Ioannis, our Metropolitan summoning me to the metropolis and giving me the Gospel, telling me to read the verses "go forth and teach all the nations" (Matth. 28, 19). I read them and he said: "Good, by Saint John's day I'll make you a priest"*. This dream came true a few months later when Fr. Yervasios summoned him to the metropolis and events turned out as he had foreseen. He was ordained on 3 July by the late Metropolitan Ioannis of Sidirokastro. His joy was indescribable and he retained it for the rest of his life.

His speech was embellished with examples and advice, aimed at presenting the majesty of the God-given priesthood, but also the inimitable joy which God grants to his clergy. He believed that priests ought to glorify God day and night for making them such a gift, because no-one is worthy in themselves of being thus attired. He also used to say that, unless God willed, no-one would become a clergyman just by wanting to, because the Lord, calls, the Lord is the gate. He knew very well that God respects people's freedom and does not abrogate our self-determination. His favourite narrative was from the book of Genesis, about Adam and Eve, about the image and likeness: it was his view that the whole of the theology of our Church was contained therein. He used examples from the Holy Gospel which demonstrated God's providence. He used to say: *"God has counted the hairs on our heads, and, unless He wills, not a single one falls to the ground. God wanted it; that's why you became His priest"*.

In other words, since He shows such interest in smaller matters, how would He be careless over such a weighty concern as who would become the shepherd of His flock, who would teach, and who would celebrate the holy sacraments of His Church, through which he himself would be sanctified and would sanctify other people? And he added to this that the priesthood is superior to royal power and would tell other clergymen that it cannot be compared to any secular position on earth, and was not to be exchanged at any price: *"If God gave me the chance to be a king or a priest, I would choose to be a priest every time"*.

He taught that the Servants of God (i.e. the clergy) should be very careful how they live, should be in constant communication with God through prayer, fight against sin all the time, be free of it, comfort people, perform their priestly functions and study the word of God: *"Have a small copy of the Scriptures with you at all times, so you can read it whenever you want and keep your mind on God"*. He urged

priests to instruct the people of God, to encourage them with great love to follow Christ and keep his commandments, so as not to prove unworthy of their priesthood in the end, in the eyes of God. He never ceased to counsel humility, which gives solace to God and people, and revilement of pride, which is the fount of all evils: *"Humility makes angels of people and pride makes the angels demons"*. Priests wives, he advised, should be calm and hospitable and look after their husbands with love,. During a discussion at the house of the Elder, a hieromonk told us that the wife made half the priest. *"Not half, Fr. Ioannis cried, "the whole!"*. Indeed, the love of the wife for the church gives wings to the priest at her side.

Fr. Ioannis served in various parishes in the region of the Metropolis of Sidirokastro and everywhere he went people loved him. When he was serving in Sidirokhorì, in the church of Saint Kyriaki, he and his wife had their fourth child. This was when one of his first trials began, since the smallest and newest member of the family suffered from acute leukemia and the doctors at the hospital in Thessaloniki gave it only three months to live. And so the first black clouds gathered over the lives of the family. He had total confidence, however, and raised his hands to heaven, asking God to extend the life of young Philip. And, indeed, to the doctors' great surprise, the child lived on and finally departed this life at the age of seven, in the Elder's new parish in Kato Poria.

In Kato Poria he served in the church of Saint John the Baptist, where he erected and finished the church of Saint Irene the Great Martyr. He also served in Leivadeia, in the church of Saint Dimitirios and in Neokhorì, in the church of Saint George, where, with the assistance of many other pious folk, he built the church of Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, whom he called the "duty doctors" for our own times. Today this church is a place of pilgrimage and His Eminence Makarios, Metropolitan of Sidirokastro, in recognition of the zeal and love for people which characterized the Elder, appointed him to the office of spiritual guide and protobresbyter on the day of the inauguration of the church. With his faith and humility, he won people's hearts. The people who came to know him speak with great admiration of his personality, but he himself never had any such ambitions. He attributed everything to God's grace and, did not wish to be called holy nor to be talked about for his virtues. Though the more as he courted anonymity, the more divine grace glorified him.

(to be continued)