

Elder Ioannis Kalaïdis (2) (Protopresbyter Georgios Trapezanlides)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



His great love of prayer

He would dedicate a lot of time to prayer. In any case, prayer is a virtue, and the mother of virtues and, as a mother, introduces us into the secrets of communion with God, according to Mark the Hermit. The Elder was himself unceasing prayer, with the unification he offered people within themselves and with God. He performed all the services on a daily basis- the midnight office and matins- he read paraclitic canons and commemorated a multitude of names- and in the evenings read vespers and Compline, kept vigil and made his prayer to the Lord, the Mother of God and various saints of the Church. He would often pray for hours and, if he was celebrating the liturgy, would read the communion prayers and then those of thanksgiving. Until his old age, he would pray in church during services and the Divine Liturgy either standing or kneeling.



He fasted throughout the year, eating only soup with rice, carrots and potatoes. Even when he was ill, he didn't change this custom, no matter what his children and the doctors said. He would refer to Christ's suffering, which He underwent for us, the curses and mocking, the scourging and whipping, the death on the Cross, so that we might understand the great love of the Lord for us, and also to be an example of patience and humility in our various trials and for us to live our lives in praise of God, looking to the crown of eternal glory on the day of His Second Coming. It was this great love of the Lord for us that attracted him to make such ascetic efforts.

Once, Fr. Sotirios Vrambakis came to concelebrate with the Elder when the latter was already in his old age. Fr. Sotirios had already served with the Elder and me in Saint George's in Neokhori, and he suggested going for a coffee. I insisted that we wait for the Elder, but Fr. Sotirios, who knew the habits of Fr. Ioannis well, said: "Father Ioannis? It'll be noon before he comes out of the church!". I later asked his wife, Polyxeni, if it was his custom to stay in church and pray after the Divine Liturgy and she revealed to me that he came home at one or two in the afternoon. I was surprised by her answer, because, apart from the fact that he was already of considerable age, he was also of a sickly disposition. There was one night when Elder Ioannis was deep in such a prayer to the Mother of God, which began in the evening and ended seven hours later, with him saying all the time "Most Holy Lady, save us", interspersed with the Salutations. Suddenly Our Lady, the Mother of God appeared to him, alive and in a light, between two choirs of women saints, who

were singing hymns to her. On the right was a choir of women martyrs who had suffered violent death for Christ and on the left the blessed women who had shone through their asceticism, abandoning the things of the world. The Mother of God, in her glory, greeted him and told him to counsel all, especially the clergy, to have recourse to her prayers, because then they would receive great grace in her name. At once, everything disappeared and he fainted.

The Extent of his Love and Patience

His asceticism, which grew from his love of God and his neighbour were a wonder to people. They were also surprised at his patience and the joy he felt at his illnesses. He never displayed the slightest irritation; his lips would simply whisper “Glory to You Our God, a thousand times glory to You”. When asked how it was possible to deal with things in this manner, he would answer: “Unless we feel pain, how will we understand? How will we feel the pain of our brother and how will we pray for him with pain in our heart?”. Precisely for this reason, which is strange for us, he counted the trials of his illnesses as blessings. He felt people inside him through their pain, and when he was praying would shed tears for them all, he felt the pain of all. Everyone found it strange that he was able to love in this way. As we mentioned above, his fourth child departed this earth at the age of seven; on another occasion he almost lost a grandchild, though, as he foretold, in the end the child survived; then there was the time he broke his hip; he had problems with his back and his breathing and many other things, but he would stand in front of the icon of the Mother of God and the pieces of the relics of his beloved Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene and intercede with pain for many people, commemorating them by name.

How did he feel the pain of others so much when he didn’t know most of them? If we look deeply at the theology of our Church, we’ll see that all of this is because of union with God: within the love of God, we find ourselves and the whole world in an ontological union. This is achieved through the road taught by the Holy Church, with the stages of purification, illumination and deification. When people wish to work together with God, they become a real person. Everyone who was close to Fr. Ioannis and knew him saw people who were fearful, pained with the trials of life, disappointed and confused, coming to him and departing full of joy: they experienced their own personal miracle, were amazed when he already knew their requests, their problems, their names, and was able to find a solution to their problems. He wanted everyone to activate the great gift of faith in Christ, he advised people go to confession, to the anointing service, fasting and in prayer, and, with the permission of their confessor, to receive the holy sacraments with

faith. He himself made his communion in the fear of God and tears always flowed from his eyes before he did so. He never became familiar with things holy and advised that we should take communion tearfully. If we couldn't do so, he said, then at least we should offer a sigh in awareness of our sinfulness and the boundless gift of Christ. He would also say: "Always greet the holy icons when you go into a church. Imagine somebody coming to your house and not greeting you. You wouldn't like it; you'd be upset at such behaviour". The way he entered a church was indescribable, as people who knew him can attest: it took him about ten minutes to get to the altar, because he would stop in front of the icons and talk to them as if they were alive.

There were lots of things that impressed me about Fr. Ioannis. I once went with the hieromonk friend to see him. When we'd talked and stood up to leave, he wanted to do something to please the hieromonk. He took some fruit and put it into his hand, but the other priest, out of politeness and shyness, didn't want to take it, because he had no need. The Elder then left us speechless when he said: "I need it, that's why I'm giving it to you". He knew that if you did a good deed to somebody, you did it to God and that our salvation depends on our love for our neighbours. He had a special way of teaching: he taught with his life. He also said, and meant it from his soul, from his being, that he was the least priest in Greece, he called himself pitiful and "food for the worms", while he would always kiss the hand of the bishops of our Church and also of younger priests. After the Divine Liturgy he would kiss us on the forehead and when I complained and said "Don't, Elder, I'm all sweaty", he would reply "That's not sweat, son, it's holy water".

Divine Experiences

According to the niptic Fathers of our Church, vision of the uncreated light is the supreme condition to which we can attain, and is granted to the perfect. I often wanted to ask him if he had had such an experience and had seen the uncreated light. I couldn't believe that such a person, with such faith in God and such humility wouldn't be found worthy of receiving the revelation of His glory. I did believe, however, that the Elder had certainly seen the holy light, because everyone who knew him spoke of the shining brightness of his face.

So one day when I was visiting him with a young man from my parish, (after we'd revered the holy relics, he sang hymns to the saints and anointed us with the holy oil that was burning in front of the icons and relics, reading prayers for health, illumination and salvation- this happened all day, every time anyone visited his house- we went into the sitting-room where he gave everyone some orange juice) I asked him whether he had ever seen the holy light. He lowered his head

immediately, and when I asked him again, shook it. So I said to him, "They say it has a bluish tinge" and he replied "Yes, son, it does". I was determined to get him to tell us. And then he told us that he'd seen the holy light a few times, but the most moving was in the church of the Honourable Forerunner in Kato Poria. "It was 24 April, 1976, Great Saturday, at the time in the Divine Liturgy when I was throwing the laurel leaves in the church and singing 'Arise, God'. When I got to the right side of the altar, light was shining down from above like lightning and it engulfed me totally. I felt that the whole of me was leaving this world, my soul was filled with joy and gladness. A lot of people in the church said that a light was shining over my head, and it lasted a good few minutes. That happened when I was the parish priest there at the Honourable Forerunner's, where I served from 1973 to 1989".

I later learned that from then on he lived with his wife as if they were brother and sister and that it was then he received the gifts of foresight and healing. In the same year, he visited the former secretary of the community of Kamaroto, who was being treated in the Galinos clinic and was in a critical condition. He read prayers for the man's health and made the sign of the Cross over him with a wooden cross which he always had with him. The man immediately recovered and sent a letter of thanks which was read out in the church of Kamaroto on Sunday.

Pastoral Teaching

He had a particular affection for children and young people. He never wanted to criticize any one, especially those of whom Christ spoke with such gentleness. He wanted young people to come to church, whenever they felt like it. He didn't want us to hurt any child with our harsh behaviour. There was one time a young girl came into the parish church for the Elder to read a prayer over her, and there was a nun standing beside him who told the girl off for coming in trousers. He said nothing, just read the prayer and, when the nun had left, he told the girl with great love: "Child, don't worry. You were in pain and you came to be healed. That's why you came like that". He knew that the nun had acted from a surfeit of zeal and, out of politeness, said nothing to her. He would often say: "Don't criticize the kids. Lots of things are wrong and that's why they react the way they do: television, the food that's full of various substances and the selfishness of the parents that distances them from their children". He also used to say: "Don't look at me. I was visited by God's grace when I was only little. Otherwise who knows what I would have become".

He loved the Church very much, loved the bishops. Some would come to visit him, but he would never say anything, because he believed he was unworthy of being

visited by hierarchs. He wanted people to have a high opinion of the Church, for it to have pride of place in people's hearts. One of the bishops who came very often to Fr. Ioannis was the late Metropolitan Antonios of Siatista. There was a strong bond of mutual love between them which did not escape people's attention.

He did not want people criticizing the Church. "If you criticize the Church, you're criticizing Christ", he would tell the faithful. As an example he would recall the event in Acts (9, 4-5) where Saul/Paul, before his conversion to Christianity, persecuted the Church. The Lord was revealed to him on the road to Damascus and said to him: "*Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?*". He said that we can find the Christ Who loves us so much only in the Church. This is where we must find Him and, if we do, we'll enjoy eternal life from the here and now. In the Church is the Mother of God, the Saints; this is where you see eternal life. He would quote as examples Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, who lived so many years before us but hear us, come and help us, do so many miracles all over the world, have revealed their lives to us and their martyrdom for Christ. "*There you are. That's eternal life. They died for Christ and are still alive. What more do we want? Our faith is living and unique*". He would also tell people who asked him about the calendar question that "*It's not calendars that save us, but our faith and works*". On the issue of identity cards, he wanted "Orthodox Christian" to be written on them.

A Christian Ending

Fr Ioannis fell asleep in the Lord on 4 August, 2009, in Neokhori, which was also the last stage in his priestly service. Bed-ridden by then, and much weakened for a long time, he waited to be called by the Lord, Whom he loved so much and served with such zeal, keeping His law, which is summarized in the two commandments of loving God, and your neighbour as yourself. For months we would go and take him the Holy Sacraments. He always waited with reverence and, as long as legs supported him, he would stand up by himself. Later he tried to stand with the assistance of his children or any persons who happened to be in the house at the time. When his strength finally deserted him, he stayed in bed, where he lived through the last pain with the patience of Job, though it was difficult for us to see him thus tested.

On one occasion, my wife Penelope and I went to get his blessing, sensing that the Elder was about to depart this mortal life. When we had hugged him for the last time alive we left his house. With him were his wife, Polyxeni, who had shown great obedience to him all those years and his children Theodora, Christos and his daughter-in-law, Anastasia. Before even an hour had passed, his children told us of

his departure, which they experienced as a migration. In a short space of time, priests came from our Metropolis to prepare his body and dress it in his priestly vestments, in accordance with the tradition of our Church. We noticed that, strangely, his Cross gave off a sweet scent. Many of the people who had known him and had learned of his departure began very early to come and take his blessing for the last time. His body remained warm until the time came for his internment. The next day, His Eminence Makarios, our Metropolitan, led the service and delivered the address for the Elder. Together we all sang the funeral service for a priest and then the priests lifted up his venerable body and the cortege set off for the final home of his relics. He was buried behind the church of Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, in a place he himself had chosen and prepared. He requested that the book “The Witness’ Testimony”, which he had written and had had published at his own expense, be distributed on the day of his funeral as a gift to those present, to the glory of the Triune God.

4 August was a sunny day. At midday it was very hot, but together with the emotion and mourning of all of us, nature decided to join in, just as we read in the Lives of the Saints. Clouds immediately gathered and it began to drizzle for a while; the sky discreetly wept for a little, nature dressed in mourning for a little, and then, because we had rendered justice to the earth, the sun came out again, so as not to spoil that last service on earth of the Elder of Love.

The Elder ascended into heaven to be with Christ and His beloved saints. He used to say: *“I’ll leave, but I’ll still see you”*. Father Efsevios Vittis said to one of his spiritual children: *“Son, if you’ve seen Papa-Yannis from Neokhori, you’ve seen a saint.*