

Elder Efrem's radio interview on Skai on the Dormition of our Lady

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Abbot of Vatopaidi monastery, Archimandrite Efrem, spoke on the radio programme "Gisa somewhere else" of SKAI 100,3 FM on Saturday 14th August 2010, on the eve of the feast of the Dormition of our Lady, the Mother of God. Elder Efrem was celebrating the feast at the Vatopaidi Metochi at Porto Lagos.

Here is the full text of the interview.

Gisa: Geronta, you are in Porto Lagos to celebrate the feast of the Dormition and I was wondering why women cannot attend?

Elder Efrem: Excuse me. This is the monastery's metochi and women can visit as well.

Gisa: Up to there, but what about further up?

Elder Efrem: The Holy Mount Athos as you know is inaccessible to women and this is the tradition spanning hundreds of years. The reason why it is inaccessible is not because the monks hate or scorn or wish to degrade women. But it is because the Holy Mountain is a men's Parthenon.

Gisa: Anyway, where you are now we can meet together.

Elder Efrem: Absolutely.

Gisa: And it is a blessed place.

Elder Efrem: Yes, of course. It is a place where our Lady's grace reigns. There is a chapel dedicated to her and another one dedicated to Saint Nicholas.

Gisa: Are there a lot of people up there now?

Elder Efrem: Quite a lot. We have three confessors who are continuously confessing people who are getting ready to take Holy Communion during the feast.

Gisa: Geronta, how does confession help people?

Elder Efrem: Confession is a very helpful means because through this Mystery a person starts to condemn himself, blame himself and hold himself responsible. Not only does he hold himself responsible in a non-verbal way before the icon, as they say, before Christ, but also before the priest who is also another human being. He comes to confess his sins. However, this meeting is not just a meeting which has man in its epicenter but a meeting with Christ, because it is a Mystery of the Church. A person will then definitely feel the forgiveness for his sins, through the grace of the Holy Spirit. This is a very important point.

Gisa: Geronta, what is the message that the feast of the Dormition offers to modern man? We are living through very difficult times down here...

Elder Efrem: We are living through difficult times but I think this feast of the Most Holy Lady is one which offers a spiritual message, a message of purity and cleanliness and devotion to the Lord. Our Lady was the first after the One, who devoted herself entirely to God. She stayed in the Holy Sanctuary, the Holy of Holies, from the time she was three years old. She is the person who experienced the grace of the Holy Spirit more than anyone else in the world. This alone bestows such a great honor on our Lady. That's the reason we call her «Most Blessed», «Most Honored», «Most Gracious» and this is the model which we must present to the world. This is this daughter who is so highly honored, especially by the monks; and also on the Holy Mountain. Sometimes, you know, people say that no women are allowed on the Holy Mountain and that monks do away with women. On the contrary, they honor Our Lady more than anywhere else in the world. They offer her this comprehensive tribute and all this devotion because she is the one who loved Christ completely.

Gisa: She is a great refuge for man even these days, isn't she?

Elder Efrem: Absolutely. The Most Holy Lady is a great refuge for all of us. People flock here with such pain, with so many trials, with illnesses and toil and troubles and we see them coming on their knees from three hundred meters away to venerate her icon, to fulfill the vows they have made for this or that trial. Then we see them again when they leave. They have been comforted and consoled and have such sweetness in their faces.

Gisa: It's curious, Geronta. Faith is not diminished with the passing of time but it is as if it becomes stronger sometimes. How can this be? Is there an explanation?

Elder Efrem: Faith is a strong spiritual weapon which is given to man because he is created in the image and likeness of God. Sometimes faith can be ridiculed and scorned by some, but it is a strong weapon not used by many, which however remains hidden inside them until the time of trouble comes, when one is really tested. Then he takes out this bag full of treasure, this great power called "faith" and uses it. And faith bears fruit.

Gisa: Since no one has ever taught us about this spiritual work, how do we find such resilience and at the time of trouble we call out to our Lady?

Elder Efrem: We may have never been systematically taught but do not forget that we live in Greece, where the environment and the tradition have always been helping man to turn to Church in times of trouble. I think the person to whom man looks up to for help in times of trouble is our Lady.

Gisa: Geronta, do miracles happen today?

Elder Efrem: Of course! Look here at our metohi at the Visthonida pond. So many miracles take place. So many people have found cure, there are so many offerings, so many letters! One is in awe when one witnesses all these miracles performed by our Lady with her icon, which is a copy of the Panayia Pantanassa icon, which is found in Vatopedi. As you may very well know the Vatopedi Monastery is the only one in the world which is adorned with seven miraculous icons of our Lady and also by her Holy Girdle.

Gisa:, Are we never going to see these since we are women?

Elder Efrem: You will see these when we are occasionally asked to take them out of the Holy Mountain. But especially we agree to take them out every now and then so that women can see them.

Gisa: What is the liturgical regime at the garden of our Lady, where you are now?

Elder Efrem: As you know today is not the feast of our Lady according to the old calendar we use at the Holy Mountain. But here at the metohi we celebrate the feast with the new calendar. We have an all night vigil this evening which will last up to five hours. The fathers from the monastery arrived here so that they can chant in the way it is done in the Holy Mountain. We are expecting a lot of people. We also hold a second liturgy at a different chapel for those who have children and

cannot attend the all night vigil.

Gisa: Do you think that the world will change at some point for the better?

Elder Efrem: We are only left with the hope which as Saint Paul says “it does not embarrass us”. I think that hope must never leave a man’s heart.

Gisa: Is hope stronger than faith?

Elder Efrem: Hope is derived from faith and it is a prerequisite.

Gisa: What would you say to someone who does not believe in God?

Elder Efrem: I would say to him to try to live in the way we do. I think that if he experiments in this way he will experience something. Since even one who does not believe has an immortal soul inside of him.

Gisa: If one does not live a Church life does it mean that he does not possess the Lord’s grace?

Elder Efrem: He may not live the life of the Church now, but we do not know what will happen at the end. As this great, modern Saint, Father Paisios Ayioritis said, we will be met with a lot of surprises during the Second Coming of Christ. We do not know how each man will end his life.

Gisa: One last question, geronta. This entire furor surrounding your name, which reminds us a little of the Christian persecutions of past times, did it leave you shaken at all?

Elder Efrem: With God’s grace, I have not been shaken, since as I have told you faith is great force. We are devoted to our duties; we are not expecting to hear praises from people. As you know, our holy forefathers, whom we read and imitate, have always been controversial figures. First it was Christ himself. A monk does not concern himself whether he will acquire a good name; He is only interested in diligently fulfilling his absolute duty: his complete devotion to God.

Gisa: Are n’t you afraid that people’s faith will be shaken?

Elder Efrem: I do not think so. A person, who is struggling spiritually, will recognize the methods and the descriptions and the reasons behind this furor. I think that common sense recognizes that it something not worth mentioning.

Gisa: You are saying that the truth will be revealed to someone sometime but in a way which may not be easily comprehensible these days.

Elder Efrem: Many times a person does not recognize the truth because of the way he lives. On our part, we pray for the whole world, the whole universe and we always maintain a loving attitude for everybody. This is our position and our mission”.

Gisa: It is very important to say that your mission is this. What would you ask for those who hear you today and those who don't?

Elder Efrem: I humbly pray that people will recognize that man is a spiritual creature and to start caring for the salvation of his immortal soul. As Saint Basil the Great, this grand Saint said: we must take care of our souls which are immortal. It is only when someone starts taking care of his immortal soul that he will come to comprehend that our Lady is present, the saints are present and that faith is a great force for the orthodox people and especially for our Greece.

Gisa: Geronta, I thank you with all my heart.

Elder Efrem: I wish you well and may our Lady be with you.

Gisa: You too. Give us your blessing!

Elder Efrem: May you have our Lord's blessing.