

Monk Hariton, the New Martyr of Kosovo (Hieromonk Stefan of Dečani)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Lord's words, Fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul (Matt. 10:28) have inspired many generations of Christians over the past two thousand years, since the sacrificial crucifixion of our Redeemer and Savior Jesus Christ. Following these words, even our sinful yet cross-bearing people have produced many martyrs and saints from the inception of Christianity until now.



Even today, when many have distanced themselves from Christ, there are God-thirsting souls who are prepared to follow Christ through death into eternal life. Such a one was Fr. Hariton.

Fr. Hariton first saw this world on the feast day of St. Michael the Archangel, November 8/21, 1960, in the village of Lukovačka Reka at Kuršumlija [southern Serbia]. He was born into the large peasant family of Lukić. In baptism he was

named Radoslav («joyous one»). Later in life he would be tonsured a monk with the name Hariton, which is the Greek equivalent of the Serbian Radoslav. Thus, at birth a mystical premonition of his future life of service in the Church was given-for every affliction endured for Christ's sake brings joy, both in heaven and on earth.

Prior to his entrance into the monastery he worked hard helping his family in the village. Later on, he educated himself and worked as a professional driver for twenty years. Thanks to his upbringing, he strove to live honorably and help all who were in need.

In his desire to do good, he at first tried to join the Communist Party, but he was not accepted. Before long he began to see all the negativity inherent in Communism. This understanding remained with him for the rest of his life, and in the light of this awareness he viewed his people's previous suffering under the rule of the Communist Party. While he did not live to see the fall of that system, of which he too was a victim, he now rejoices in heaven with all those who suffered at the hands of the Communists, knowing that it was not in vain that those blossoms were torn from the garden of the Serbian people.

While he was still living in the world he thought of getting married. At one point he even came close to marrying, but eventually the Lord revealed to him another path of salvation-that of the ascetic life. In honestly and wholeheartedly turning to the Lord, he wanted to follow Him in the most perfect and sincere way. With this in mind, he thought of going to the Holy Land, there to serve the sweetest Lord Jesus. Arriving as a pilgrim, he wanted to remain as a monk in the monastery of St. Sava the Sanctified in Jerusalem. However, by the unknown decree of Providence he was not accepted at that holy lavra¹, and thus returned to his homeland.

During the last several years before he entered the monastery, Fr. Hariton lived and worked in Niš². He was known and remembered by all the faithful there solely for his goodness. He never gave up his God-pleasing intention to become a monk, and waited patiently for the right opportunity to fulfil his desire. Knowing that the Lord does not abandon His servants, he turned to the Lord with the sincere prayer that the path of salvation would be opened to him.

Fr. Hariton's great faith and love toward the Lord is evident from the following incident: Once when he was very ill, he turned in tearful prayer to his icon of the Mother of God «Of the Three Hands» and did not rise until he had received healing. His faith was increased through this incident, and in the future he would receive more confirmations that God is indeed real and answers prayer.

Guided by the Lord, in 1995 Fr. Hariton entered the Crna ReKa (Black River) Monastery at Ribarić. There, in his service to God he also served the patrons of the monastery, the Holy Archangels and St. Peter of Koriša. Upon his entry into the monastery the battle with the old man (cf. Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22) began. Full of resolve and self-sacrifice, Fr. Hariton directed himself toward the higher ideals of monastic life.

Surrounded by younger men who were not used to physical hard-ship, he did his best to help each one in his common chores. Day and night he disregarded his own need for rest in order to help those brothers who needed assistance.

With a blessing from his abbot, he also assisted the monastery's neighbors, especially the infirm and elderly, always joyfully hastening to fulfil such obediences. Taciturn and patient, he gave the impression that he was from another world. While he entered the monastery desirous of the solitary life, he would fulfil the obedience of driver without complaint whenever his abbot assigned him that task. In this duty he showed great care for his passengers. While he himself had been a professional driver and had liked to go fast, he would nevertheless overcome his own preference and proceed slowly and cautiously.

At times Fr. Hariton could appear austere and strict in his zeal for the truth. The essence of his character, however, was characterized by love and self-sacrifice, which was demonstrated by deeds rather than by words. Ever silent and sober, he would speak readily only when he felt that his words would bring benefit to the common good. At all times he was careful not to hurt others or himself by his speech.

Within the monastery, he immersed himself in the Lives of Saints and the teachings of the Holy Fathers. While he conducted his life in their spirit, he would strive not to be noticed by those around him, as his spiritual father taught him.

Possessing nothing yet possessing all things (II Cor. 6:10), he struggled in this manner as a novice for two years at Crna Reka. Then, in obedience to his spiritual father, Bishop Artemije, he was called to assist in the rebuilding of the monastery of the Holy Archangels near Prizren, Kosovo.

Once again, Fr. Hariton was (with whom he was connected by birth), and he tirelessly gave of himself in the reconstruction of that holy place. Immediately he began to assist his new superior in preparing living accommodations for the brothers to move into. In these labors, whether as a driver or on some other obedience, he did not spare himself and paid no attention to his own physical exhaustion. With constancy, he quietly and soberly fulfilled his missions. He was the first to arrive in church and never asked to be relieved of reading or chanting the services. He would stand by the kliros as straight as a candle, never taking a seat, and always focused on the words of the readings and singing.

On May 10, 1998, just before the vigil service to the patron of the chapel, St. Nikolai (Velimirović) of Ziča, Hariton was tonsured a monk by Bishop Artemije. Following his tonsure Fr. Hariton added labor to labor, becoming ever more zealous in obedience. He strove all the more to fulfill the tasks assigned to him and was never one to refuse even the most difficult jobs. One of his obediences was to obtain supplies for the monastery. He was also called upon to pick up important materials for the diocese, and for the bishop and his assistants. In these difficult tasks he was extremely reliable.

He could always be counted on to carry out any kind of job, because he did his best to labor according to his conscience, never thinking of himself or of what time of day or night it was. There are many examples of his eagerness to serve others, such as one time when he was ready to drive off in the middle of the night during the worst attacks of the so-called Kosovo Liberation Army (KLA), over the most dangerous terrain of Dulje and Crnoljeva, to bring healing water to an ailing brother in Christ. He was at peace and totally prepared to carry out that obedience. However, he was stopped before he could start the car. With the same readiness and peace within himself, with neither murmuring nor comment, he received a new blessing to remain.

While Fr. Hariton was capable of doing almost anything, and while he was knowledgeable about many things, he would never offer advice to his abbot. He preferred to serve rather than advise. When on occasion he did make a suggestion, it always proved beneficial to the monastery. For his integrity, Fr. Hariton earned the respect of his monastic brothers and the visitors who knew him. We all

remember how he would often sit in the corner of the refectory reading the Lives of Saints or praying.

He would not keep anything in his cell that he did not need, even books. Besides a prayer book and a Bible he had only a few books, which he had received as a gift from his abbot. Even these he kept only out of obedience, not because he needed them. He was the same way in regard to icons. In his cell, which he never called his own, he kept only three icons. In regard to appearance, he was tidy, clean and simple. There was nothing about him to attract the attention of others except that, in both winter and summer, he always wore rubber *opanke* (handmade peasant sandals) with wool socks, and a vest over his robes, and only on the coldest days would he add another vest, identical to the first one. At church services he wore the complete monastic attire.

Mindful of his spiritual father's teaching to remain silent at the refectory table and eat whatever is put before one, he would eat whatever he could and never complained to the cook. If there was no dish that he could eat, he would suffice himself with bread and tea. In serving guests he was polite and without regard to race or creed. He did his best to like all people. Even when the Shiptari committed crimes against our people, he did not hate them. Rather, he tried to justify their actions by blaming the godless regime.

While Fr. Hariton was not directly involved with the outside world, he was not ignorant of its events. However, he strove to remain dispassionate. He clung to the «one thing needful,» the Lord Christ, accumulating nothing for himself, keeping in mind that only what can be sent on to the *heavenly treasury-where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt* (Matt. second from the left, standing. 6:20)-will remain with us when we meet the Lord.

We cannot remain silent about his endurance of illnesses. He always remembered his healing by the Mother of God. After that incident, he never turned to an earthly doctor. Once he became ill with what appeared to be hepatitis. Spurning any assistance, he retired to his cell and turned to the heavenly Healer. For several days he ate nothing. So that he would not scandalize the brothers, he told them that he would get food on his own. A few days later he emerged from his cell without any symptoms of illness.

When traveling, Fr. Hariton was careful not to demean the monastic calling by behaving improperly. He was cautious even concerning such details such as not eating ice cream on the street, but rather waiting for the proper circumstances. He was careful of his actions outside the monastery and even more so within it,

diligently following the monastic codes of behavior, such as refraining from touching anyone, even from placing one's hand on another's shoulder.

That he was a man who tried to be patient with others is evident from the following example. One of the brothers would always ask Fr. Hariton to help him with his chores. Everyone thought that Fr. Hariton helped him because he liked to. One time, however, that brother went overboard in his request and Fr. Hariton had to confess to the abbot that many times he had barely been able to refrain from yelling at the brother. The situation had been nearly unbearable for some time. Nevertheless, Fr. Hariton continued to assist the brother with each of his numerous demands, never publicly showing his frustration.

He was also kind to the neighboring Muslims. He tried to help them in many ways and intervened on their behalf as he did for other poor people. In his compassion, he often spoke up for them so that they would receive whatever material things they needed. Occasionally one could glimpse the softness of his heart when a tear would roll down his cheek as he listened to stories about the suffering and persecution of innocent people.

Fr. Hariton concealed his life behind a mask of disinterest. For all that he did for those around him, he kept quiet and did not draw attention to himself. His behavior drew criticism from some, but he never defended himself, believing that the monastic way of life should be respected, and not wishing to be spiritually harmed by deviating from it. His actions helped many. He spoke and acted in a simple and direct manner. When he was presented for ordination to the priesthood, he declined out of humility. His spiritual father understood this and did not force the issue. Truly, Fr. Hariton never allowed his speech to outweigh his actions.

Though he suffered at the hands of those he defended, he never showed any hatred, even when on May 1, 1999, when he was driving to visit a person sick in the hospital in Pristina, an automatic rifle was shot at him. Because he had no hatred in his heart and believed others to be the same, he remained calm and fearless in these circumstances. This purity of heart allowed him to move about freely even after the Serbian army retreated [from Kosovo and Metohija] and the criminal gangs known as the KLA poured in.

During June of 1999, he drove his superior to Prizren every day, each time having to drive through an angry mob of Shiptari who were celebrating their «victory» over the Serbs. Once, alone and without any protection, he fearlessly and calmly drove a mortally wounded man to the hospital through the same mob. After this

incident, he told his bishop that he wished to remain in his Serbian monastery in the land of the Serbs. He said that he had not hurt anyone and wanted to stay-whether to live or to die. He was already prepared for anything.

Indeed, it was on June 15, 1999, that he received his last obedi-ence on earth. At 10:30 A.M. he arrived by car at the diocesan see in Prizren and then departed to a family residence to pick up a meal they had kindly prepared for the bishop. As usual, he departed cheerfully, without complaint and without any sign of fear. He did not return from this trip. Along the way, in plain sight of NATO troops who had arrived [in Kosovo and Metohija] to bring «peace and freedom,» Fr. Hariton was captured by the criminal horde and taken to the place of torture.

Messages were sent to officials in all directions, but nothing more was heard about his whereabouts. While the criminals wished to re-main silent about the crime, the Lord did not want Fr. Hariton to be forgotten. And as the martyrs are free to send messages to those on earth, so too did Fr. Hariton. He appeared in dreams to several of the brothers and told one that he was dead.

It was not until a year later that these dreams were confirmed. His tortured body was found near Prizren, behind the hospital in the town of Tusus. The body was identified by his monastic robe, his prayer rope, and his identification documents. The autopsy revealed torture: several of his ribs were broken, as well as his left hand. His vest was torn, and there were stab wounds near his heart. His body was headless, and several of his vertebrae were missing. We know that Fr. Hariton did not deny his faith. He suffered because he was a Christian, a monk, and a Serb.

On November 11 , 2000, his tortured remains were brought to his spiritual father, Bishop Artemije, at Gracanica Monastery [in Kosovo]. The following day the body was taken to Crna Reka Monas-tery, where Fr. Hariton had begun his monastic life. At Crna Reka, Bishop Artemije addressed the monks and the faithful who were gath-ered with the following words: “Fr. Hariton, we received you here sev-eral years ago as a novice, and now we receive you as a martyr”

The All-night Vigil was served together with the continuous read-ing of the Psalter over the departed. The next day, the Divine Liturgy was concelebrated by more than thirty priests. The Liturgy was fol-lowed by a memorial service attended by more than five hundred believ-ers. Fr. Hariton was then taken to the cemetery for a final tearful farewell. The martyr was the first to be buried in this cemetery. Now he burns continually like a candle before the Lord-just as the candles lit at the Liturgy and memorial service were not extinguished, and that light continues to burn atop his grave, witnessing his eternal life in God.

May we join together in the prayer that the Lord will glorify Fr. Hariton in the earthly Church as He has in the Heavenly. May his as-cetic sacrifice and martyr's blood truly be the seed of the new Chris-tians. And may all who receive inspiration from his example of quiet service and martyric suffering walk with even more devotion on the path of our God-bearing and holy ancestors, who suffered «for the Honorable Cross and Golden Freedom.» Together with them, in the unity of the Church militant and the Church triumphant, we whole-hearted cry out: Holy Father Hariton, pray to God for us!

* Translated by Andjelka Raicevic from the Serbian-language journal *Sveti Knez Lazar* (Holy Prince La-zar), Prizren, Kosovo, no. 32 (2000), pp. 91-97.

1 *Lavra*: a coenobitic monastery noted for its size or imponance.

2 The ancient city of Niš is located about forty miles to the northwest of Fr. Hariton's home village in Kuršumlije.

Source: Hieromonk Stefan, Monk Hariton, new martyr of Kosovo, *The Orthodox Word* 241 (2005), pp. 57-67.