

The Three Saints of Pain and Hope (Dr. Nikolaos Koios, Content Coach of Pemptousia)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)

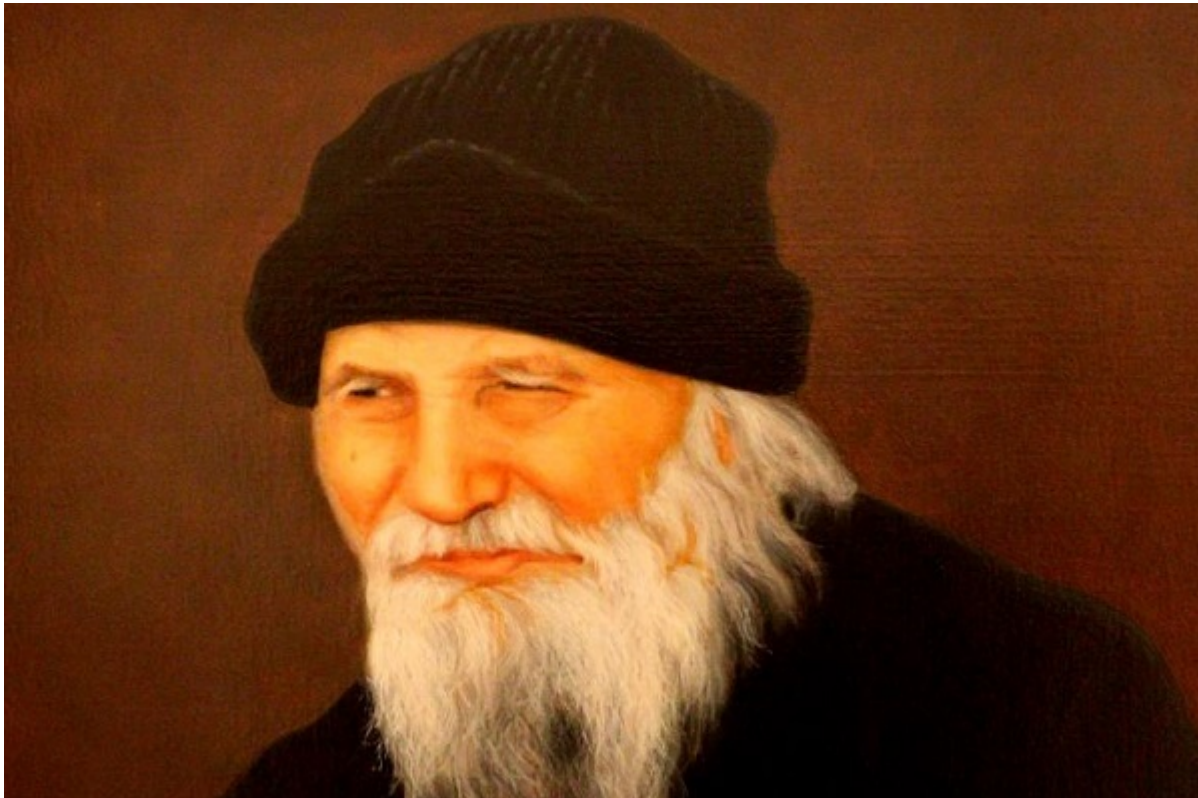


It's a profound conviction of the Orthodox Church that every epoch has its own saints and there's not a single age without them. In every era, the saints are proof and demonstration of the grace of Christ, the love of the Father and the communion of the Holy Spirit, in place and time, among us. When saints leave this earth for their celestial abode, they leave to the generation which knew them the privilege of Saint John the Theologian (I Jn. 1,2) to declare 'what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands'.

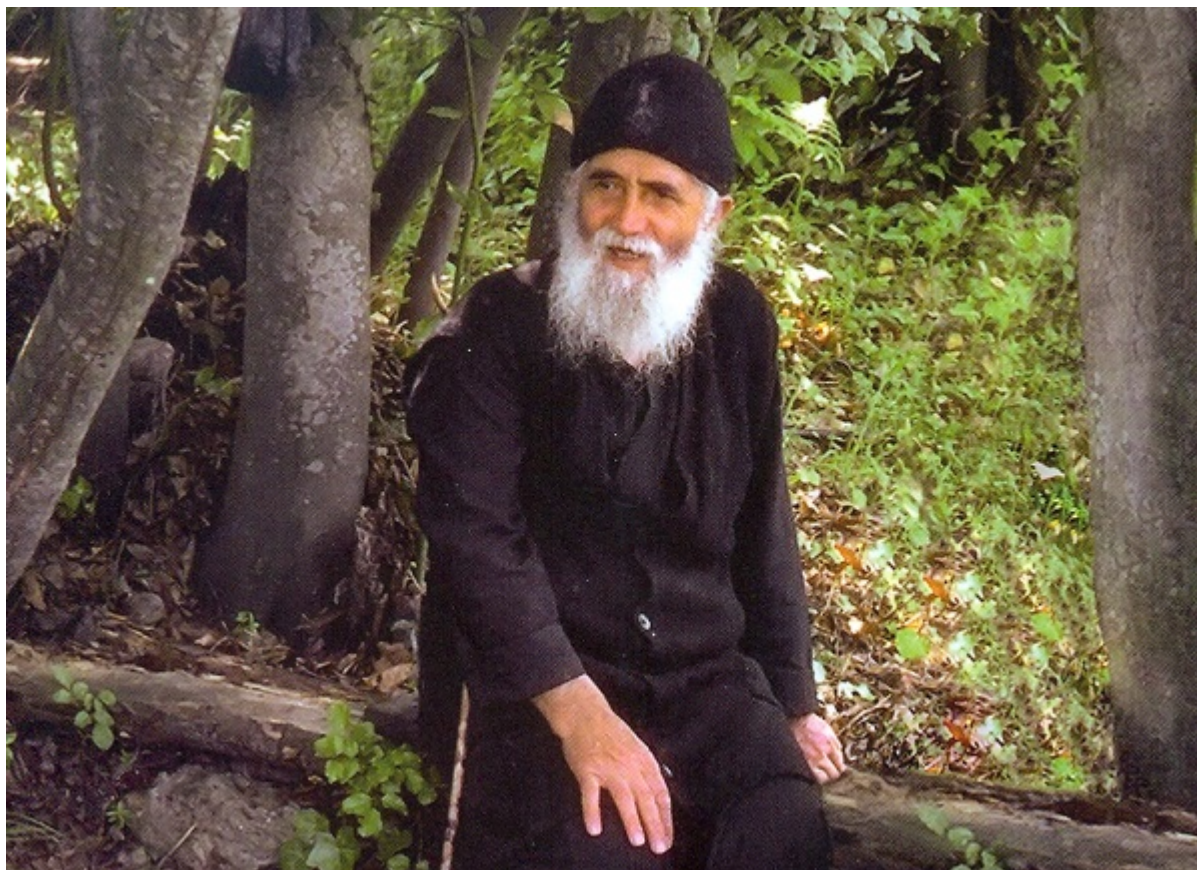


Our own generation knew three Elders, Iakovos, Porfyrios and Païsius, who have now been entered officially into the Book of Saints of the Orthodox Church. Most of

us were in primary, secondary or tertiary education when we went to visit them and receive their blessing. We understood little from their words and personalities. We went either because we were encouraged to do so by our families or because of the reputation they'd acquired in the Church, among the people of God. Usually we went along because everyone else was going.



Sometimes, not often, we found the opportunity to reveal our adolescent thoughts to one of the three saints and we'd receive spiritual comfort and valuable advice, which we usually didn't follow. But we kept it in our hearts and minds as a valuable 'deposit' which would come in useful later, when the difficulties of life required it. Mostly we received a portion of grace in the few moments we were with them. Grace and inexplicable joy. Time stopped. The cares of life were effortlessly set aside. Thoughts and considerations about our individual self faded away. At that moment, we weren't concerned about our problems. There was a sense of eternity, that what we were experiencing then would continue forever.



But when we left, this feeling lessened and in a short time we landed- sometimes smoothly, other times not so much- back in the harsh reality of our normal lives. Not only our own routine, but also that of other people, close or distant. All those we hear about every day and those who are closest. We listen to the latter, see them, touch them, to the point where we get accustomed to them, are bored by them, annoyed by them, consider them obstacles in our way and even hate them. And all of this without initially having any bad intentions. On the contrary, we all enter the struggle of life with the best of intentions, with a desire for progress and productivity. But time and reality prove us wrong. We don't get what we want, or what we think we deserve. We become disappointed in others. Especially those who are particularly high in our estimation. They don't give us the sympathy and comfort we're looking for and of which we have an increasing need as time goes by. The recollection of our personal contact with the saints, the three saints of our generation, seems distant in terms of our situation and this often worries or sometimes even shocks us. Why shouldn't these saints be with us all the time? Why won't they send us even just a ripple of that grace we felt when we met them in our younger days? Why have they left us to manage on our own, deprived of any sense of their blessedness, in circumstances which are increasingly harsh?

We mentioned at the beginning that each era has its own saints. They're its own saints not only because they lived at a particular time and place, but also because

God's providence for that specific generation was manifested in them. Our own generation was that of the prosperity which followed the Second World War and, in Greece, the Civil War and the concomitant political instability. The previous generation was concerned more with healing wounds, in order to get back to its feet. Ours wanted nothing to do with the past, preferring to enjoy, with extreme optimism, the present, with no particular interest in the future. Inevitably, that future then became the present. And prosperity and irrational optimism were replaced by a general crisis and by pessimism. Our generation wasn't brought up to face pain and difficulties. It was a generation that had it easy. This is why its saints saw them and felt them in this way. The saints of grace, of comfort and of joy. It was easy for them to pass these on when we were with them. But we never wondered how they themselves acquired them. We would read in the ascetic books and the Sayings of the Elders about 'giving blood and receiving the Spirit', but we never really experienced it as part of us.



Yet in the end, the three great saints didn't actually abandon us. They returned a few years later with their canonization in our Church. The Church, the Body of Christ of which we're all members, understands that this generation is seriously ill. It suffers from the sickness of fleeting and ill-founded prosperity and ease and isn't robust enough to face the trials brought on by the crisis. Our Holy Church brings the saints back onto centre stage by honouring their lives and, above all, the manner of their death.

If we look closely at the saints of each era, we'll see that they had certain things in common, certain characteristics. The saints of the Apostolic age, the martyrs of the Early Church, the ascetics of the desert, the great fathers of the Ecumenical Synods, the theologians of the experience of the uncreated light, the Athonite saints, the new martyrs and many other groups of saints in every era, though they can't all be mentioned here. In the three saints of our own time we see two common characteristics- not the only ones, but those which correspond to the predicaments of our age: pain and hope. All three shared deeply the pain of the millions of people in our generation: the pain of sickness, of abandonment, of poverty. Especially the pain of illness, the most obvious sign of dissolution and mortality. Which people today try with all available means to avoid and banish. None of these three saints escaped it. Each of the three had quite a collection of illnesses, which they bore themselves, while curing those of others. And although all three died in terrible pain, according to the testimony of those who were with them at the time, they left something to our once prosperous, now floundering generation. They bequeathed hope, through their living presence in the Church; hope that at some stage we'll once again feel that inexplicable grace and joy in their presence.

May we have their blessing.