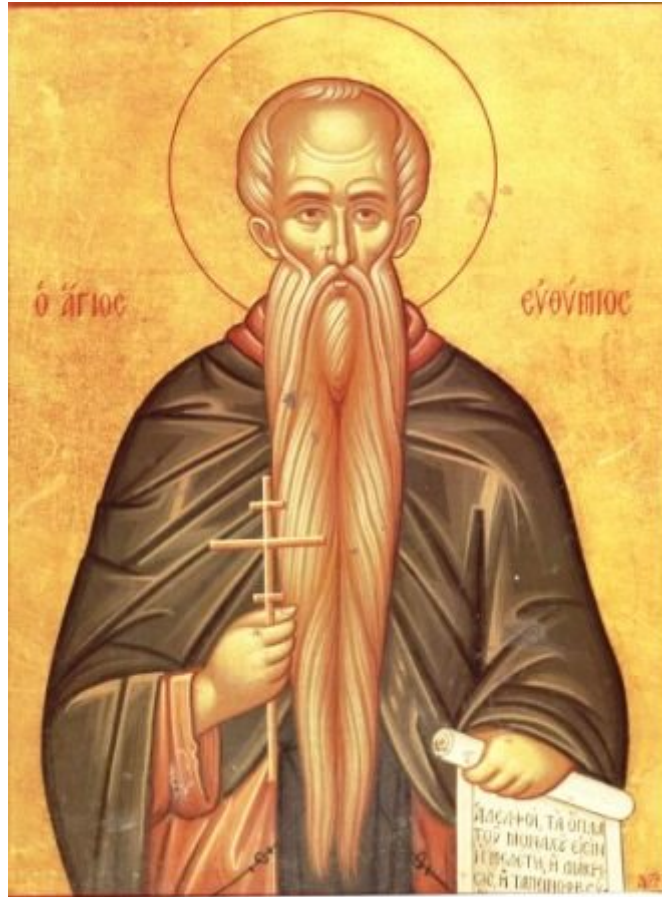
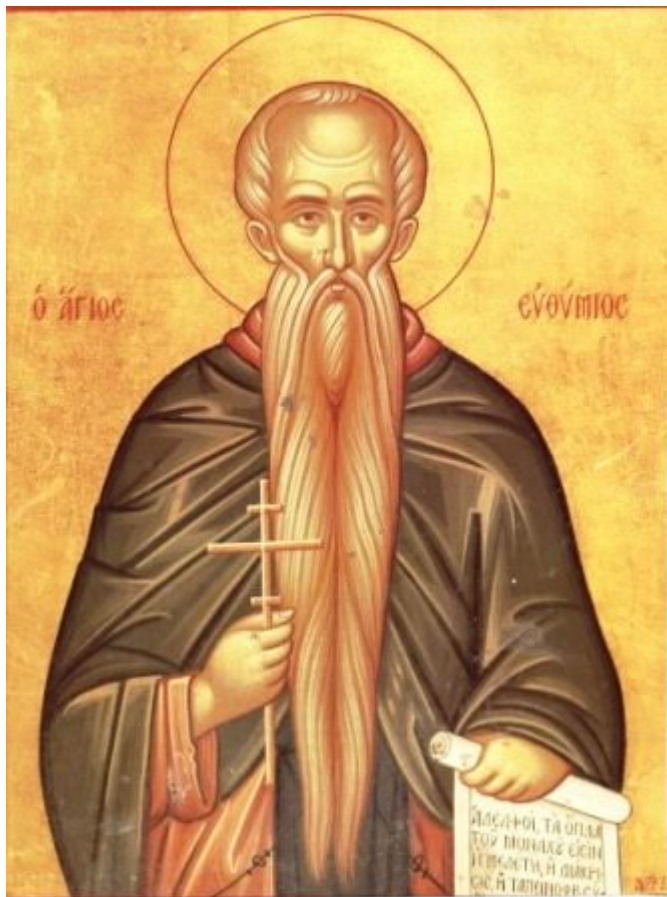


20 Ιανουαρίου 2018

## **Own will and obedience (On the feast day of St Euthymios) (Elder Joseph of Vatopaidi)**

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)





Reading about the lives and deeds of two great Fathers, St Pachomios and St Euthymios the Great, offered us the opportunity to touch on some issues which relate to our practical duty. I would like to remind you that the Holy Mountain is linked with St Euthymios and generally speaking with the brotherhood at St Savva Monastery. The Stoudiou monastery established its spiritual regime based on the regime at the St Savva monastery. The same regime was copied by St Athanasios, the founder of the cenobitic way of life, when he moved to Athos and is being practiced to this day.

It is vital to note that both Saints attach great importance on the strict adherence of one's conscience (ακρίβεια συνειδήσεως) and the strict observance of the practical regime with special emphasis on the need to relinquish our 'own will' (ίδιον θέλημα).

One may operate according to his own will in many ways, but the most crucial are the following two: A) for reasons which 'come from the right', e.g. one follows his will on the excuse that it is the devout thing to do. B) For reasons which 'come from the left', e.g. one follows his will for selfish reasons. Both ways are devastating. But the most dangerous one is the first. The second way is obvious.

He who operates according to his own will to satisfy his desires is met with shame. He, however, who operates according to his own will for reasons which 'come from the right', has almost no cure, since he is impossible to be convinced that he errs, since he boasts that he is devout and is struggling spiritually. Did you notice the monk who was acting according to his own will for reasons which 'came from the right' in the biography of St Pachomios?

What does it mean 'doing what we want for reasons which come from the right'? It means that man is able to gain his deliverance as a reward for his own efforts. However, as we have stressed so many times, our salvation is not a matter of transaction. The Lord is not a Despot who wishes to take something from those he rules and if they do not deliver, he disinherits them. Even to think of such thoughts is ludicrous and blasphemous.

God's relationship with us is Fatherly and we are related to Him as His children. It is an absolute Father-Child relationship. Therefore, we are not saved by our deeds. What saves us is the love of Father-God, which flows out to His beloved children provided they practically prove with their lives that they cherish their relationship with Him as His children. Our entire effort to comply with God's will has this aim. We do not act in order to accumulate advantages which will force the Lord to give us what belongs to us. These beliefs are only espoused by western heretics and Jews who believe in the Law.

You have noticed that the monk in the story was struggling fiercely, was showing self control and was intensifying his struggle. He ought to have been given more awards. Yet, the Lord did not see it this way. Instead of gaining more Grace, as he thought he would, he was demonized. Saint Pachomios set him free with his prayers.

We encounter a similar case in the life of St Euthymios. One of his disciples was a strong and able man. The coenobium needed him to carry the heavy essentials. Since he was a farmer, he knew about manual tasks and was seen as the proper man for the job. The Saint called him and informed him of this decision. The monk reacted negatively and was finding excuses saying: 'I cannot do this, Elder. If you appoint me to this job, I will be going here and there, I will be neglecting my regime and the church services and I will not be able to keep up with my spiritual duties'. He was using his own flawed reasoning, the reasoning of the 'transaction' and not of faith. St Euthymios consoled him: 'No, child. This will not happen to you. We, who have elected you to this post, know very well what we are doing. We will be praying and your fears will not materialize. On the contrary, you will derive a lot of benefit from this service'. The monk again did not wish to obey,

insisting on his own flawed reasoning that if he was not going to follow the line of the holy fathers and deal instead with several and varied responsibilities, he was going to 'lose his soul'. Finally the Saint warned him: 'we have advised you to do what will benefit you, child. Since, however, you will follow your own will do not blame us when you reap what you sowed'. No soon did the Elder speak and the devil entered the monk's soul. It threw him on the floor and he started freaking out and frothing at the mouth and doing all those things the devil awards his servants with. At the instigation of the other monks, the Saint healed him. As soon as he recovered, he assumed the task he was given and excelled at it.

*source: Translated by Olga Konari Kokkinou from the Greek edition : Γέροντος Ιωσήφ Βατοπαιδινού, Διδαχές από τον Άθωνα, Εκδόσεις 'Το Άγιον Όρος' Θεσσαλονίκη, 1989.*