

Father Symeon Krayopoulos: “Are you afraid of death?” (Georgios Ant. Galitis)

Ξένες γλώσσες / In English



[Previous publication: <http://pemptousia.com/2016/07/father-symeon-he-never-advertised-never-proselytized/>]

As time went by, he acquired spiritual children in Athens, too, particularly among people who had moved from Thessaloniki. He took care of them, as well, going down usually once a month for confessions and holding a vigil at the same time. To these few were added genuine Athenians and his arrival was soon eagerly awaited.

In order to celebrate in another diocese, such as Athens, he needed the canonical permission of both bishops, Thessaloniki and Athens. I approached the then Metropolitan of Thessaloniki, the late Panteleïmon II, with whom I'd been friends from our time as students together, and he gave his permission. When I asked the late Archbishop of Athens, Serafeim, he said in his typical manner: 'You're asking my permission for this? Tell him I want my friend to come. As if I would say no. Tell the altar-boy to come. As if it would bother me!' Naturally, he called Fr. Symeon 'altar-boy' as a term of endearment.

At first he celebrated and held confessions in the chapel of the 'Bread of Life' institute in Marousi. Later, for a variety of reasons, we moved to the dependency of the Holy Sepulchre in Plaka, and then finally to the dependency of the Monastery of Sinai in Ambelokipi. Both the late Patriarch Diodoros of Jerusalem and His Eminence Damianos, Archbishop of Sinai were happy to give him their permission.

But it wasn't only in Athens that he had spiritual children. His reputation was established throughout Greece, Europe and America. For a time, he went regularly to Germany, and to other places as the occasion arose. In general, he wasn't bothered by travelling, despite his delicate constitution.

Part of his pastoral care included pilgrimages. Every year, without fail, for a long period of time, he would visit Jerusalem and Sinai with his spiritual children. Later, when he saw the spiritual benefit these excursions brought to his spiritual children, he extended them to Greece and the rest of Europe. He was tireless, had amazing endurance and was interested in everything. After a conference in Finland, when I told him what was happening with Orthodoxy there, he became so enthusiastic that the next excursion he organized was to that country.

A few months before his demise, when he'd begun to fail, he asked me in one of our discussions: 'Are you afraid of death?'. I answered: 'My feeling is that we're in a waiting room with lots of other people. The door will open and our name will be called. What I'll find when the door closes behind me, I don't know. I fear 'the dread day of judgment', but 'I take heart in the mercy of His loving-kindness'. So I'm not overcome by terror. And you?'. 'Exactly the same', he replied succinctly.

So, in the end, was that Father Symeon? Can you see the depths through a few snapshots, a few fleeting images, a few superficial glances? You can't describe sanctity and you can't formulate it. The experiences which are deliberately hidden, but which can be guessed at from the many hints, escape notice and record. But that's what a person is: his or her personal experiences, not their external behaviour.

I had the blessing to be acquainted with a Person. A man of God. I saw God in his face. Countless people saw God in his face. Now, however, he's seeing God face to face. Now he's sitting at supper in the kingdom of heaven, 'a fellow citizen of the saints and a familiar of God', a select guest 'at the wedding feast of the Lamb', wearing the bright wedding garments which he prepared through the whole of his earthly combat. And there, next to the throne of God, he will continue to care for his spiritual family which continues to live 'in the land and the shadow of death' and in the 'valley of tears' and will intercede for the souls whom his love had shaped. He will continue to help them in a way that now God alone knows.

Source: Georgios Ant. Galitis, Emeritus Professor of the Theological School of the University of Athens, *Ένας άνθρωπος του Θεού· π. Συμεών Κραγιόπουλος*, The Holy Women's Monastery of the Birth of the Mother of God, Panorama, Thessaloniki 2016.