

OUR PRAYERS HELP THE DEPARTED

From the life of Saint Paul the Simple

Saint Paul the Simple, who is commemorated on March 7th, relates the following event:

I had a disciple who was very negligent, and who would commit different sins secretly. After he passed away, I began to beseech our Lord and the Most-Holy Theotokos to reveal to me where my disciple was. After praying for several days, I saw my disciple in a vision: He was being held by two other people, and he looked petrified. When I saw this, I was deeply grieved.

I became very worried. I began to give alms on his behalf, I had Liturgies performed in his name, and I continued pleading day and night to the almighty Queen of Heaven and our compassionate God for his soul.

After very many days, I saw our Panagia, and she said to me, “What is wrong grandpa? Why are you so sad?”

“It is because of my disciple, my Lady. For I saw that he is suffering.”

The Panagia responded, “Didn’t you ask me to show him to you? Behold, I fulfilled your request.”

“Yes, my Lady; however, I was not expecting to see him in this dreadful state.”

Then the Virgin Mary said, “On account of your labors, your humility, and your love, I will show him to you again so you can rejoice.”

The following day, I saw my disciple. This time he was walking joyful and he said to me, “Your prayers, Father, moved the Most-Holy Theotokos (because she loves you very much) to entreat the Savior, and He freed me from bondage.”

Just as he finished saying these words, I saw the Panagia, and she said to me, “Have you learned how your disciple is now, O Elder?”

“Yes, my Lady,” I replied, “and I thank you.”

“Go, then,” she said, “and always remember the brother in your prayers, give alms, and perform Liturgies for him, because the deceased received great benefit from the Divine Liturgy and alms that are given with faith.”

From the life of Nun Makrina (†1995)

Maria (this was Mother Makrina's name before she became a nun) lost her parents and was orphaned when she was nine years old. When she was twelve years old, she found work at a tobacco factory in Volos. She used the first money she earned from this job to have a forty-day Liturgy for the souls of her parents. Her spiritual father began the Liturgies for forty consecutive days, and she would attend the service daily. She would wake up at 3:00 am, and walk for approximately one hour from her home to the chapel of Saint Apostle the New Martyr. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, she would immediately leave for her work. During the forty-day period that the Liturgies were being served, she would pray in private in her home as well, for God to rest the souls of her parents.

On the fortieth day, when the final Liturgy was to be held, a little before she woke up, in a state half-way between sleep and vigilance, she found herself in a green pasture with flowering trees, similar to almond trees when their branches are in bloom in the spring. She heard a voice telling her that this place belonged to her parents. Deeply moved, she began to call out to them, and they appeared to her, at which time she asked them anxiously if they are in a place of rest. They joyfully replied, "It was nice where we were before, but now we are even better."

After this, she prepared to go to the final Liturgy. At the conclusion of the service, as her spiritual father was handing out the antidoron, he asked her to stay behind for a while because he wanted to speak to her. Maria waited and shortly thereafter her spiritual father came to ask her how she felt while praying for her parents. Before Maria was able to respond, he told her that he also had seen them the night before just as she had seen them.

Maria then comprehended the immense value of the forty-day Liturgies, and when she later became an abbess, she always recommended to people to perform liturgies for both the deceased, as well as for health and support of the living during life's various difficulties.

From the book *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

Do you know how much help the departed seek! Since there is no repentance after death, and as humans they also departed with stains and blemishes, and since they see that the help of the living greatly assists them to be perfected and find rest, they yearn, seek, and long for someone to commemorate them. They also long for one of their descendants to

become a priest or a virtuous Christian who will care for them.

Let me tell you about a vision of a certain bishop which he himself told me while we were serving together years ago. He told us that there was a priest who had a drinking problem and often got drunk; this was going on for many years. Other than this, though, the priest was virtuous and pious. One day he drank wine as usual and got drunk, and then before he was fully sober, he went and served Liturgy. So God allowed an accident to happen: he spilled the holy Body and Blood of the Lord! The poor fellow froze with fear, while also thinking about the heavy penance his bishop would give him!

Finally, after he confessed, his bishop told him, “Go. I will notify you when to return, and then I’ll give you the penance.” As the bishop was all alone reflecting and pondering, and as he picked up a pen to write his decision to depose him, he saw an endless multitude of people of every age, kind, and class unwind before him like a movie. The bishop was stunned by this vision but was also overcome with fear. Then all those people together exclaimed, “Your Eminence, do not punish the priest! Do not depose him!” Then, little by little, they disappeared.

Afterwards, the bishop called the priest to come. The poor priest was terrified, thinking about being deposed. The bishop said to him, “Tell me something. Do you commemorate many names when you serve Liturgy?” The priest answered, “In the *proskomidi*, Your Eminence, I commemorate names for a long time—from kings and emperors down to the last pauper.” The bishop then said to him, “Go, then, and whenever you serve Liturgy, commemorate as many people as you can, and take care not to get drunk anymore. You are pardoned. Thereafter, the priest—with the help of God—was delivered from drinking.

From the book *Counsels from the Holy Mountain*

In the Skete of St. Anne lived a certain hieromonk Savvas, the famous “Papa-Savvas” as he was called. Fr. Joachim Spetsieris had him as his spiritual father. The Empress of Russia, Catherine, also had him as her spiritual father. He served the Liturgy every day; he was a God-bearing, clairvoyant teacher of noetic prayer.

Once some people asked him, “What motivates you to commemorate so many names in the *proskomidi*?”¹

¹ The *proskomidi* is the service of preparation for the Divine Liturgy in which the portion to be used for the Eucharist is cut out of the *prospophora*, and during which the living and the dead are commemorated.

He answered, “When I was younger, we called the bishop to consecrate the church above the Holy Monastery of St. Dionysios. After the consecration, the bishop said to my elder, ‘May I give Papa-Savvas some names to commemorate for forty days, since he serves Liturgy every day?’ My elder told him, ‘Give him as many as you want.’ So he gave me sixty-two names. When I had completed thirty-nine Liturgies and was about to serve the fortieth, I leaned against the chanter’s stand and waited for my elder to come, so that I could say the entrance prayers to serve the Liturgy. I fell asleep and saw in my sleep that I was wearing priestly vestments and was standing before the Holy Table. On the Holy Table was the holy diskos for the Liturgy, and the holy chalice full of the holy Blood of Christ. Then I saw Papa-Stephen come and take the communion spoon and the paper from the proskomidi, approach the Holy Table, and put the paper on it beside the holy diskos. Then he dipped the spoon into the holy Blood of Christ and a name was erased. He dipped it again, and another one was erased, and so forth until all were done and the paper was clean.

“Then I awoke, and in a little while my elder came. Immediately I told him what I saw. The elder said to me, ‘Didn’t I tell you not to believe in dreams?’ After the Liturgy he added, ‘You are not worthy for their sins to be forgiven; through the power of the Blood of Christ their sins were forgiven.’ So this is the reason why I commemorate the names of everyone.”