

THERE IS LIFE AFTER DEATH

From the book *Saint Paisios of the Mount Athos*

Saint Paisios relates the following experience:

I knew an old woman who was very stingy. Her daughter was very good, and whatever she wanted to give as alms she would throw out the window so she could leave the house with empty hands, because her mother would always check to see if she was taking anything. Then she would go pick up whatever it was and give it away. But if she told her mother that “the monk” [that is, me] had asked for something, then her mother would be willing to give it up.

After her death, I saw a young man [her guardian angel], and he said to me, “Come—so-and-so wants you.” I couldn’t understand what happened to me, but we were standing in front of a grave in Konitsa. He moved his hand, like this, and the grave opened. Inside, I saw a grimy mess and the old woman, who had started to decay. She was calling out, “Monk, save me.”

My heart went out to her. Feeling sorry for her, I climbed down inside and without being repulsed I embraced her and asked, “What’s wrong?”

She said, “Tell me, didn’t I always give you anything you asked, willingly?”

“Yes,” I said, “that’s true.”

“All right,” the young man reassured her.

He moved his hand like this again and closed the grave like a curtain, and I was back in my cell.

The sisters from the monastery of Souroti asked me, “What happened to you on the feast of Saint Andrew?” I answered, “Pray for so-and-so’s soul.”

Two months later, I saw her again. High above an abyss, there was a plateau with palaces, a lot of houses, and many people. The old woman was up there. She was very happy with the face of a small child that had just a tiny spot that her angel was also scrubbing to clean off. In the abyss, in the distance, I saw people being beaten and harassed, and trying to climb up.

I embraced her out of joy. I took her aside a little, so the people in the abyss wouldn’t see us and be hurt. She said to me, “Come on, let me show you the place where the Lord has put me.”

From the book *Athonite Fathers & Athonite Matters*

There was a simple and compassionate monk, named Fr. Gregory, who worked as an attendant in the geriatric hospital of the Monastery of St. Paul (on Mount Athos).

He himself told me [relates Elder Paisios] the following event from his life. About forty years ago, when he was serving in the monastery's geriatric hospital, one of the other monks gave him a bunch of grapes as a blessing. He decided not to eat any of the grapes; rather, he cut them into smaller bunches and shared them amongst the elderly monks. One monk, out of extreme appreciation—because they were the first grapes of the season he had eaten—kept wishing him, “Good Paradise to you! May you find these in Paradise!” The attendant, with simplicity, replied jokingly:

“Go ahead and eat your grapes, blessed soul. Paradise and Hell are here in this life.”

Although he was only joking and didn't believe what he said—furthermore, he also had the excuse of being simpleminded—this is what happened to him.

That night he had a frightful dream, which he experienced as if he was awake! He found himself gazing out over a sea of fire. Across the other side, there was a beautiful bay with crystal palaces. From the distance, he noticed that there was a venerable elder who lived there. The elder was radiant—even his beard appeared to be of silk. There, he also encountered a brother from the monastery who had fallen asleep in the Lord three years prior. He began to ask the brother about these palaces (which impressed him tremendously), and about the venerable elder.

“He is Elder Abraham,” replied the brother, “and this beautiful coastline with the crystal palaces is ‘the bosom of Abraham,’ where the righteous souls come to rest.”

When righteous Abraham heard the brother saying these words, he looked at Fr. Gregory and ordered him with a stern voice:

“Get out of here! You have no place here!”

When Fr. Gregory heard Patriarch Abraham censuring him, he quickly turned around to leave; however, he hadn't gone too far when the flames from the sea caught up to him. The fire started to scorch him, and he woke up from the pain. To his surprise, his leg was burnt and covered in blisters at the exact area where he had felt the fire burning him. The pain in his leg continued for another twenty days before the wounds finally healed with the aid of various ointments and practical remedies.

Fr. Gregory bitterly repented for what he had said, and in the future he was much more careful with his words.

From the book *The Wondrous Miracles of St. Nektarios*

A lady, who had never met St. Nektarios (+1920) while he was alive, related that her husband (who was not a particularly faithful or pious man) happened to kiss the right hand of the holy hierarch during the funeral procession when his body was being transferred from Athens to Aegina. To his amazement, he felt the Saint's hand warm and soft, and ever since then he became a pious and faithful Christian.

After hearing her husband's account, she was saddened by the fact that she did not have the opportunity to venerate the body as well. That same night, the saint appeared to her. She found herself within a church. She noticed that His Eminence was standing before the Royal Gate, full of light and serving the Liturgy, while the faithful in the church cried out: "Nektarios became a saint!" She then cut through the crowd with her son, she approached the hierarch, received his blessing, and left full of joy.

Shortly thereafter she visited the Monastery to venerate the grave of the recently deceased hierarch. When she saw a photograph of him, she was astonished at the resemblance because, as already mentioned above, she had never seen him when he was alive.

Five months after the repose of St. Nektarios, the nuns wanted to place an honorary marble top over his grave. The Abbess Xenia, however, was reluctant because in order to set the marble in place, the grave would have to be opened, and she feared that the remains may emit a foul odor, indicative of all corpses. She had not revealed these thoughts to any one else, when one night a certain nun saw St. Nektarios in a vision.

The Saint asked her, "How are you?"

"Well," replied the nun, "through your holy prayers your Eminence."

Then the Saint said, "Bow, so that I may cross you."

After she bowed, St. Nektarios crossed her three times and then asked, "Do I smell?" After the nun answered that she does not smell anything, he asked her more overtly, "do I stink?"

"Who says that you stink, your Eminence?" replied the nun. "How is it possible for you to smell bad?"

"The abbess says so."

"Which abbess?" inquired the sister.

"Abbess Xenia. Take a look at me. Is there anything missing?" He then showed her his hands, his feet, and his back and asked, "Am I not fully intact?"

"Yes, you are completely intact," agreed the nun.

The nun informed Abbess Xenia of her vision. In following, the grave was opened and, indeed, the saint's body was found incorrupt and

completely intact. They witnessed that his head, his hands, and his feet were bendable. The entire body of the Saint appeared as a person who was asleep.

From the book *Narrations from Dionysiou Monastery*

Our brother Ignatios fell asleep in the Lord on June 7, 1953, at the age of 64. After developing a persistent headache, he was sent to Thessaloniki where he was diagnosed with meningitis. One week later, he passed away and was buried at the same hospital chapel of St. Photini.

Mr. Sotirios Tsaganos who was a relative of the deceased was present at the funeral. A short while later, Mr. Sotiris informed me of the following in a letter he sent me: “I have seen many dead people; however, monk Ignatios looked as if he was alive. His face was bright and shiny.”

Three years after his death in August of 1956, our Abbot Archimandrite Gabriel was in Thessaloniki, at which time he went to the aforementioned chapel cemetery in order to exhume and transfer the remains to our Monastery. When the sexton who was unearthing the grave reached the remains, he exclaimed the following: “Oh, my! It’s too soon. We should have waited longer.” He said this because he observed that the garments were fully intact and looked just like they did at the time of burial. Thus, he assumed that the body underneath had not decomposed entirely either. However, he was in for a surprise! Even though the shirt, socks, belt, and *rasso* were intact and had not disintegrated, underneath, the bones were found bare and yellowish-brown in color—a discovery that greatly astonished the sexton.

After the relics were translated to our Monastery, on August 11 of the same year, we conducted a memorial service. At the conclusion of the service, the skull (which had been placed within a reliquary box and set on a small table) began to emit an extraordinary fragrance that was felt by most of the monks present in the church. Some of the monks asserted that this was a result of Divine Grace; others doubted and maintained that perhaps aromatic compounds had been used to wash the skull during the disinterment in Thessaloniki. The following morning, I went to the Abbot and asked him if he had washed the skull with any perfumes when the remains were uncovered. “No. No such thing happened,” he replied. “I washed it with plain water. I washed it myself with my own hands.”

The reverend Abbot Archimandrite Gabriel also told me the following: “On my way back from our dependency one day, I met a virtuous elder named Serapion who lives in a neighboring hermitage. When brother Ignatios’ name came up during the conversation, the elder related the following: ‘I was very indebted to father Ignatios. During the two times he was assigned as the steward of your dependency, he would provide me with food and clothing, as well as other things I was in need of. He was an extremely merciful and compassionate man. When I found out that he passed away, moved by love, gratitude, and indebtedness, I began to pray for him with my prayer rope, beseeching our Lord

to forgive him of any sins he may have had as a human, and to place him in Paradise along with the saved souls. On the fifteenth day, as I was praying in this manner, my cell suddenly filled with a strong, bright light and amidst it I saw our brother Ignatios alive, joyful, and shining. He bowed his head to me, and with love and respect said: ‘Thank you Fr. Serapion. Thank you for your love. Please, do not tire yourself anymore for me because our merciful Lord saved me, and I am very well, fortunate, and blissful amongst the saved saints.’ This is what he told me, and he immediately vanished.”

This is what my reverend Abbot related to me concerning our beloved brother Ignatios. May we all mimic his life and conduct to the glory of Christ our God. Amen.

From the book *Saint Paisios of Mount Athos*

“As soon as I went to live at the skete,” recalls Saint Paisios, “an elderly gentleman whom everyone referred to as old Thanasis and who worked for Philotheou Monastery as a forester, found out about it and came to see me. He was a friend of mine, and he brought me some blessings, since I had just moved to the skete, and I did not have anything. I thanked him, and I told him to write down the names of his departed relatives, so that I could commemorate them. Influenced by a certain Jehovah’s Witness, he replied, ‘When someone dies, there is nothing else—after death everything is lost.’”

“Soon after that, he himself died. When I found out, I went to Philotheou Monastery and saw his grave. Every day I prayed from my heart for God to give rest to his soul. About twenty days after Mr. Thanasis passed away, I found out that someone from Philotheou was looking for me. It was one of the stewards of the monastery, and he came to me all upset. ‘Father,’ he said to me, ‘old Thanasis, the one who just died, came to me and complained that I have forgotten him and have not done anything for him. And he told me that you are the only one who helps him with your prayers. The truth is, I have not commemorated him in my prayers. Now that I have become a steward of the monastery, I take care of the office, and I have a lot of work ... What can I do? I have also stopped doing my own prayer rule.’”

This event strengthened the Elder, so that he henceforth prayed even more for the souls of all the departed.