

TESTIMONIALS CONCERNING THE FRUITS OF PRAYER

—From the former Abbot of Dionysiou Monastery, Mount Athos—
Elder Haralambos (†2001)

We would pray for many hours when we were living with Elder Joseph,¹ and during the first years following the passing of the Elder as well. And the Lord granted us a good deal of grace, through the Elder's prayers. I would pray while standing for 6, 8, sometimes even 10 hours. Sometimes I would feel extremely tired and felt horrible. Other times, a lack of desire would come upon me. In such moments I would say to myself: "You are not sick. You ate today. You also drank today. So, now you will struggle. You will die right here praying!" I would not back down at all! And not long afterwards, I would feel such consolation, such peace and bliss, that for the next 4 hours I felt as if I was not touching the ground. I was praying for 4-5 hours, and it felt like 10 minutes had gone by. During those days, I experienced many spiritual states. God had given me much grace.

Once while praying, as I was saying the Jesus Prayer, I am not exactly sure how it happened, but I suddenly saw (with my soul) that I grew and became as tall as the ceiling. In following, I started to become smaller, smaller, smaller... until I became the size of a tiny ant. At that time I was thinking that millions of ants (that is, people) like myself exist throughout the world. I do not know exactly how, but at that moment I saw the entire earth. I was seeing the mountains, the forests, the wild animals, etc. and, as I marveled at everything, I began to think just how small man is indeed. Subsequently, I saw all the oceans and the sea creatures that exist within them, and I marveled even more at God's grandeur and man's minuteness. In following, I am not sure how, but I left, I came out from myself, and I ascended very high, to cosmic heights. I was seeing the earth like a sphere, like a ball, and around it were thousands of other spheres, and I became amazed at the infinite vastness, at the endless universe. Then I heard a voice

¹ This is Saint Joseph the Hesychast. Elder Haralambos became Saint Joseph's disciple and lived with him for nine years. After the repose of Saint Joseph in 1959, Elder Haralambos remained at New Skete until 1967. In 1967 Elder Haralambos moved to the Skete of Bourazeri, and in 1979 he became the Abbot of St. Dionysios Monastery.

saying, “God, the creator, is not contained within this vast and infinite universe. And the earth is the footstool of God’s feet!” At that moment, I felt that God’s feet were, so to speak, touching the earth. And, full of fear, I thought to myself that, if His feet were to lightly nudge the earth, it would disappear into the depths of the universe, it would fall into the void. I then immediately came to myself, soaked in tears and contemplating man’s minuteness and God’s infiniteness. I sensed and had the awareness of the minuteness and nothingness of man. Ever since, this feeling has always remained within me.

Another time as I was praying, I saw (with my soul) myself at a distance across from me. I was lying down dead, wearing my *epitrachelion*.² I started to wonder, “what account will I give to God for my actions, for my life?” And I was overcome by with extreme fear. When I came to myself, I had the awareness of the memory of death. Ever since, I always had this sense of the memory of death! Whenever I would bring to mind what I had seen, tears would flow from my eyes, and I would meditate upon the events associated with death. And so, the memory of death that we contemplate using various thoughts and images is one thing (and it is good); however, the memory of death that God grants with awareness is something different.

² The *epitrachelion* is a liturgical vestment worn around the neck by Orthodox priests, symbolizing the grace of the Holy Spirit and their sacramental authority.