

THE PRIEST WHO BEHELD THE THEOTOKOS AND REGAINED HIS VISION

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

In Paris, there was a wise and virtuous priest who was a calligrapher. This most holy person deeply revered the Mother of God, and had a long-standing desire to behold her glorious beauty in his lifetime. Thus, he frequently prayed to God about it, and the Lord fulfilled his request, as it is written: "He shall do the will of those who fear Him, and He shall hear their supplication" (Ps. 144:19). One day an angel from heaven appeared to the priest and proclaimed: "The Queen of the universe heard your prayer, and sent me to tell you to prepare yourself. On Sunday during matins she will visit you. You will see her, and you will behold just how much beauty she possesses. Realize, however, that you will not be able to fully perceive her, as she appears in the heavens, but only to the extent that human nature permits. Furthermore, you should know that on account of her blinding brilliance, you will lose your eyesight, and will remain completely blind." To this the priest responded: "I will gladly give up my temporary vision, as long as I have the blessing of beholding the sweetest face and radiance of my Lady the Theotokos."

Shortly after the angel departed, however, the priest began to have second thoughts and hesitation. "How will I be able to live blind for the rest of my life?" he thought to himself, "since I will neither be able to write nor to take care of myself?" Contemplating such things, he decided that he would close one eye, and behold the Most Holy Theotokos with the other one, in order to retain vision in at least one eye.

When the appointed time finally arrived, the Most-Holy Theotokos appeared to him with unimaginable brilliance and beauty, which no mortal tongue can describe nor human mind can fathom. After gazing at her for some time with the one eye, mesmerized by her divine glory and heavenly grandeur, he decided to open his other eye as well, in order to delight fully in this blessed sight. However, at that very moment the Mother of God disappeared. Subsequently, he

was able to see out of the one eye he had closed; while the other one with which he had observed her radiance became completely blind.

From that moment onward, he started blaming himself for his lack of faith: "Woe to me, the fool! How did I deprive myself of such a glorious vision and delight? I should have gazed at the Mother of God with both eyes in order to rejoice fully in her beauty—even if it meant becoming completely blind. My God, please allow me to see her one more time, and, after that, may I lose the vision in my other eye as well."

He prayed in this way persistently to God and the Holy Virgin with tears and fasting, begging her to appear to him a second time. Finally, one day, the angel of the Lord appeared to him again and informed him: "The Most-Holy Theotokos had compassion on you, on account of your pain and tears. Since you are willing to remain completely blind for her love, she has accepted to come again for you to see her," The monk then responded: "I thank her graciousness immensely; I extol and glorify her for showing such kindness to me. Not only am I willing to give up my vision, but I will gladly give up my hands, my feet, and any other part of my body as well. I will even agree to give up my life—as long as I get to see my Lady." The angel answered him: "It is on account of your piety that you were deemed worthy of seeing our Lady tomorrow. And realize that not only will you not be deprived of your sight, but you will also regain vision in your other eye. You will see her clearly with both eyes, and your heart will leap with joy."

And indeed, this is what happened. When the Virgin Mary appeared to him, the priest initially fell to the ground on account of the overabundance of brilliant light, just like the Apostles had done on Mount Tabor. However, the Most Holy Theotokos soon strengthened him with her grace and enlightened his entire soul and body. He then slowly stood up and beheld her with both his eyes for a considerable time with inexplicable delight. When the vision came to an end, the Mother of God departed for the heavens, while the priest, forever grateful for her benevolence and for restoring his vision, continued living with virtuous conduct until he was called to proceed to the eternal abodes. May we also be made worthy of this through the prayers of the Most Glorious Theotokos and all the saints. Amen.