

# THE PRIEST WHO WAS RESURRECTED AFTER DROWNING

—from the book *The Salvation of Sinners*—

There was once a priest from the region of Lombardy, in northern Italy, who held the Ever Virgin Mary in extreme reverence, who furthermore recited the 24 stanzas of the Akathist Hymn every day with compunction and piety. Despite this, as a human being draped in flesh, the poor clergyman became ensnared by the defilement of fornication. One day, when returning to his home after satisfying his desire, he began to read prayers to the Panagia as he was crossing over a bridge. While he was praying, either through the maliciousness of the devil or some other natural cause, the bridge collapsed, and the priest drowned in the river below. Immediately, the demons seized his soul, ready to drag it to Hell. However, before they could do so, the most merciful Mother of God appeared and commanded them to hand this soul over to the righteous Judge, so He could decide as He willed.

Thus, they set out, and, having arrived at the tribunal, they began to show detailed records of all his sins, particularly emphasizing his recent transgression of fornication. On account of this, they argued before the Judge that, as a just God, He should not show mercy to this priest, but He should surrender his soul to them—since he died shortly after committing a deadly sin. On the other side, the protectress and advocate of all Christians, the Most merciful Lady Theotokos, responded: "It is also written in the Holy Scriptures, 'As I find you, so will I judge you.' At the moment he died, he was praying to me with the Angelic Greeting: "Rejoice Mary, You who are full of grace!" This was his long-standing habit, as my genuine servant. Therefore, according to justice, you demons have no rights over this soul; unquestionably, he belongs to me." Upon hearing this, God ordered an angel to go bring the priest's tongue to Him. The angel flew immediately to the river, removed the dead man's tongue, and returned with it to the tribunal. When they inspected it, the following was found written upon it: "Rejoice Mary, You who are full of Grace."

Then, the Lord turned to the soul and said: "Go back to your body, and repent whole-heartedly. The demons have no authority over you on account of the reverence you have for My Mother. For through her prayers, the human race receives salvation. Therefore, honor her as much as possible, and proclaim the great boldness she has before Me, and her unvanquished power over the demons." Subsequently, the angel retrieved the priest's body from the river, the priest came back to life, and the angel ascended into heaven once more. The priest was thus saved from both physical and spiritual death. Henceforth, he denied the world along with every secular pleasure, and proceeded to become a monk in a monastery, where he achieved great virtue with the help of God.

Do you see how much help they who reverence the praiseworthy Ever-Virgin receive? We should realize that the degree of our love and reverence for the Mother of God determines the measure of her intercessions and mercy that we will receive when we stand before the fearsome and unerring tribunal of the Lord. Through her prayers, and the prayers of all the saints, may we be deemed worthy of the Heavenly Kingdom. Amen.