

*The grace possessed by that saint radiated into my own soul too*

In the *Kyriakon* where I went for vigils and other services I got to know holy men. Listen and I'll tell you about a hidden saint.

Up above our hermitage, very high up, there was a Russian, Old Dimas, who lived alone in a primitive hovel. He was exceedingly devout. Old Dimas remained virtually unknown throughout his life. No one mentions his name or speaks of his charismatic gift. Think of what it meant for him to leave Russia! Who knows how long his journey took. He left everything behind to come to the end of the earth, to Kavsokalyvia, and there he spent his whole life. And he died unknown. He was no egotist. On the very contrary, he was a fierce combatant. He had no one with whom to share his experiences and to whom he could say, 'I did five hundred prostrations today and this is what I felt...' He was a secret combatant.

Yes indeed, that is a perfect thing, perfect and selfless — selflessness, worship, holiness, face to face, without any obsequiousness towards men; the servant before the master. Nothing else at all: no abbot, no 'well done', no 'why is this thus?'. I saw a living saint. Yes, an unknown saint, poor and disdained. Who knows when he died? After how many days, or even months if it were wintertime, would we learn of it? Who would go all the way up there to his rude stone hovel? No one saw him. Often those hermits would be found two or three months after their repose.

The outpouring and superabundance of grace flowed over my pitiful self when I saw Old Dimas making prostrations and dissolving in tears in

his prayer in the *Kyriakon*. With the prostrations of that man, grace overshadowed him so profusely that it radiated out even over me. It was then that the richness of grace was released over me also. Certainly, the grace existed before with the love I had for my elder. But it was then that I sensed the grace with exceptional intensity. Let me tell you how it happened.

One morning at about half past three I went to the *Katholikon*, to the Holy Trinity church, for the service. It was still early. The *simantron* had not yet been sounded. No one was in the church. I sat in the narthex beneath a stairway. I was hidden from sight and was praying. All of a sudden the church door opened and in walked a tall elderly monk. It was Old Dimas. As soon as he entered he looked around and saw no one. So then, holding a large prayer rope, he started to make rhythmic prostrations, rapid and numerous, and at the same time he repeated continually, 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me... Most Holy Theotokos, save us.' After a short time he fell into ecstasy. I cannot, I simply cannot find words to describe to you his behaviour before God — motions of love and worship, motions of divine craving, of divine love and devotion. I saw him standing opening out his arms in the form of a cross, like Moses at the Red Sea, and he made a sound: 'Ouuuuuuuu!...' What was that? He was bathed in grace. He shone in the light. That was it! Immediately his prayer was communicated to me. Immediately I entered into the atmosphere surrounding him. He hadn't seen me. Listen. I was deeply moved and I started to shed tears. The grace of God came upon my pitiful and worthless self. How can I describe it for you? He transmitted the grace of God to me. The grace that that saint possessed radiated into my soul also. He transmitted to me his spiritual gifts of grace.

So Old Dimas had fallen into ecstasy. It happened without his willing it. He couldn't control his experience. That's not right either, what I'm saying. I can't express it. It is seizure by God, divine catalepsy. These things cannot be explained. They can't be explained at all, and if you explain them you fall very wide of the mark. No, they cannot be explained nor can they be rendered in books, nor can they be made comprehensible. You must be worthy to understand them.

*Old Dimas transmitted to me the charisma of prayer and of clear sight*

At four o'clock the bells rang. As soon as he heard the bells, Old Dimas made a few more prostrations and stopped praying. He sat on the low stone surround — I think there was a stone-built surround in the narthex — and in came Makaroudas — that was their affectionate name

for Makarios. He was nimble and soft-spoken. He was a little angel. How well he lit the oil-lamps! How well he lit the chandelier! And how well he snuffed out the lights again, one by one! How well he made his prostrations as he asked forgiveness right and left to take the service books in order to intone the words for the singers. How I loved him! He deserved to be loved, because he had the grace of God.

So Makarios, Makaroudas, entered into the main church. Old Dimas followed him, opened the door, and entered also. He stood and arranged himself in his stall, thinking that no one had seen him. I, too, concealed by the shadow of the stairway, stealthily and gingerly entered the main church. I went and venerated the icon of the Holy Trinity and returned and stood to one side. At the summons 'With the fear of God...' many of the fathers received Communion. I, too, made a prostration and received Communion. From the moment that I received Communion I was overcome by an intense joy, an enthusiasm.

After the service I went out into the forest alone, full of joy and exaltation. Madness! As I walked towards the hermitage I silently repeated the Prayers of Thanksgiving. I ran through the forest passionately, jumping for joy and stretching my arms out wide in enthusiasm and I shouted aloud, 'Glory to You, O Gooood! Glory to You, O Gooood!' Yes, my arms remained stretched out rigid, like a piece of wood and my body formed the shape of a cross. If you had seen me from behind, you would have seen a cross. My head was lifted up to the sky and my chest was expanded along with my outstretched arms ready to take off for the heavens. My heart wanted to fly. What I'm telling you is true, I experienced it. How long I remained in this state I don't know. When I came to, I lowered my arms and walked on silently with tears still in my eyes.

I arrived at the hermitage. I didn't eat anything as I usually did. I couldn't speak. I went to the chapel, but I didn't sing anything — none of the hymns of contrition that I usually sang. I sat in my stall and repeated the 'Lord, Jesus Christ, have mercy on me'. I continued in that state, but somewhat more calmly. Emotion was choking me. I dissolved in tears. They poured effortlessly from my eyes, on their own. I didn't want them, but it was emotion at the visitation of God. The tears did not stop until the evening. I couldn't sing or think or speak. And if anyone else had been there I wouldn't have spoken to him. I would have gone away to be on my own.

One thing is certain. Old Dimas transmitted to me the charisma of prayer and of clear sight at the time when he himself was praying in the narthex of the Holy Trinity church, the *Katholikon* of Kavsokalyvia.

What happened to me was something I had never thought of, neither had I ever desired it, nor expected it. My elders had never spoken to me of these gifts of grace. That was their way. They didn't teach me with words, only with their way of life. When I read the lives of the saints and ascetics I saw the gifts that God gave them. Believe me, I never thought that I would receive some charisma from God. It never crossed my mind. And that which I had never thought of appeared suddenly and I never gave any importance to it.

In the evening of the same day I went out of the church and sat on the low wall looking out to sea. It was approaching the time when my elders usually returned. While I was looking to see if they were coming, I saw them suddenly appear. I saw them descending some marble steps. But that place was far away, and I shouldn't normally have been able to see it. I saw them by the grace of God. I was filled with enthusiasm. It was the first time this had happened to me. I jumped up and ran to meet them. I took their haversacks.

'How did you know we were coming?' asked the elder.

I didn't reply. But when we arrived at the hermitage I approached the father confessor, Father Panteleimon, and secretly and out of the hearing of Father Ioannikios I said to him:

'I don't know how to explain this to you, but when you were on the other side of the hill I saw you loaded with your haversacks and I ran to meet you. The hill was like a pane of glass and I saw you on the other side.'

'All right, all right,' said the elder, 'don't give any importance to these things, and don't tell anyone, because the evil one is watching.'

*I lived among the stars, in infinity, in heaven*

The gift of clear sight, as I have told you, was something I had never desired. Nor, when I received it, did I attempt to increase it or cultivate it. I gave no importance to it. Neither have I ever asked, nor do I ask God to reveal something to me, because I believe that is counter to His will. But after the experience with Old Dimas I changed completely. My life became all joy and exaltation. I lived among the stars, in infinity, in heaven. I wasn't like that previously.

From the moment I experienced the grace of God all the gifts were multiplied. I became sharp-witted. I learned the Trinitarian canons, the Canon of Jesus and other canons. Simply on their being read and sung in the church I learned them by heart. I recited the Psalter by heart. I took care with some psalms that have similar words so that I didn't mix them

up. I genuinely changed. I 'saw' lots of things, but I didn't speak, that is, I wasn't given the right to say anything, I wasn't 'informed' to speak. I saw everything, I registered everything, I knew everything. From my joy I no longer walked on the earth. My sense of smell was opened and I smelled everything, my eyes were opened and my ears were opened. I recognized things from far away. I distinguished the animals and the birds. From the sound of the call I knew if it was a blackbird or a sparrow, a finch or a nightingale, a robin or a thrush. I recognized all the birds by their song. At night and at dawn I delighted in the chorus of nightingales and blackbirds, all of them...

I became another, a new, a different person. I turned everything I saw into prayer. I referred it to myself. Why does the bird sing and glorify its Maker? I wanted to do the same. The same with the flowers: I recognized the flowers by their fragrances and I smelled them when I was half an hour away. I observed the grasses, the trees, the water, the rocks. I spoke with the rocks. The rocks had seen so much! I asked them and they told me all the secrets of Kavsokalyvia. And I was filled with emotion and contrition. I saw everything with the grace of God. I saw, but I didn't speak. I often went to the forest. I was greatly enthused by walking amidst the stones and the rushes, the thickets and the tall trees.