

ELDER JOSEPH
OF VATOPEDI

SAINT JOSEPH
THE HESYCHAST
LIFE – TEACHINGS
[1897-1959]

TRANSLATED FROM THE GREEK BY
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AMENDED AND REVISED

HOLY GREAT MONASTERY
OF VATOPEDI
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PROLOGUE TO THE THIRD PUBLICATION

A very important factor in the revival of the art of *nipsis* (internal watchfulness) at the heart of Orthodox Monasticism, but also in the choir of the struggling members of the Church at large, was undoubtedly Saint Joseph the Hesychast. A genuine offspring of the Holy Mountain, he was a devout follower of the Philokalic tradition and teaching of the great niptic Father of the fourteenth century, Saint Gregory Palamas.

Closed off for almost the entirety of his life and inaccessible to many, Saint Joseph, who was recently glorified as a Saint by the Orthodox Church, managed through his great self-renunciation and precision in the observance of all the commandments of Christ without exception, as well as through the incessant invocation of the saving name of our Lord Jesus Christ, to remove the garment of the old man and put on the 'new man, which is being renewed' (Colossians 3:10). Thus, since he himself became a light, he was able to enlighten with his example and words those who approached him at his humble and ascetic abode free of all worldly comfort, but also through his letters that he wrote to hundreds of the faithful.

We still remember how our blessed Elder Joseph would jokingly say about his spiritual Father, Saint Joseph, that he gave such a 'push' to the matter of inner contemplation, in other words, to the spiritual work that is undertaken in the inner, mystical world of the soul – which had unfortunately been neglected – that today even the small school children hold a prayer rope in their hands and know the 'Jesus Prayer'.

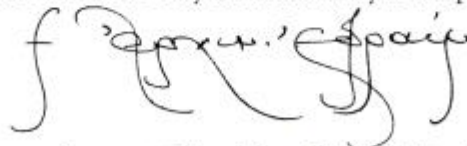
Saint Joseph was a 'hunter' of grace who became a mystic of grace. He endorsed and sealed in these the end times, through both his teaching and his experiences, the words of one of the greatest Russian Saints, Saint Seraphim of Sarov, who declared, quite a few years ago, that the meaning of man's existence in this life is nothing other than the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. Saint

Joseph the Hesychast considered divine grace to be the principal ontological element of man, and that is why he insistingly said the following about the experience of it: ‘Do not consider yourself to be a human being if you haven’t received grace. And if we don’t receive grace, in vain we have been born as men.’¹ He emphasized that ‘a true monk is a product of the Holy Spirit.’² The significance the Saint placed on this is especially important today, because contemporary man unfortunately does not know what man is!

Although this is the third printing of the Life of Saint Joseph the Hesychast, it is however the first since his Glorification on March 9, 2020. The only change we made to the text of our blessed Elder Joseph is the replacement of the title ‘Elder Joseph Hesychast’ with ‘Saint Joseph Hesychast.’ We also take this opportunity to announce that because of the several requests we have had to translate the ‘Ten-voiced Trumpet’, a work of the Saint, into a more accessible language for the contemporary Greek, we are planning to publish it in modern Greek as well as in English in the near future.

We humbly wish to the readers of this remarkable book – which transports us, as all who read it will perceive, into the lives of the great ascetics of the desert of the early Christian times – the intercessions of the niptic Saint Joseph the Hesychast to help us in our Christian struggle, so that we also may taste of the grace that he himself experienced; that we not be deprived of divine mercy and that we will be found together with him at the right hand of Christ our true God, Who is “Wonderous in His Saints”.

The Abbot of the Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi



1. SAINT JOSEPH THE HESYCHAST, *Letters & Poems*, Holy Great Monastery of Vatopedi, Mount Athos, 2023, p. 272

2. *Ibid.*, p. 283

THE LIFE

1. *Childhood and Youth*

Saint Joseph's homeland was Paros in the Cyclades, a small island, but peaceful and, at that time, a place with strict moral standards. His parents were simple people and not well off, so that the children were obliged to work for a living from an early age. His father, George, did not live to bring up all his family. So the children, already poor, were now orphans as well – something not that uncommon in poor families. His mother Maria, a real woman of God in all her natural and acquired character traits, was, in the words of the Lord, 'an Israelite indeed, in whom there was no guile' (Jn 1:48). This blessed soul had such simplicity and integrity that many times in her life she saw supernatural phenomena, and believed that everyone else must be seeing them too. This happened especially when she went into churches, whether for services or just to take care of the church.

When Saint Joseph went off to become a monk and his mother heard about it, she told her relatives, 'From the time he was born, I knew he would become a monk' – and she recounted the following story.

'Just after my Francis was born' (that was his name in the world), 'I was on my bed with the baby beside me, swaddled, when I saw the roof open and a youth with wings came down, very beautiful and so bright that I could hardly look at him. He stood beside my baby and began to uncover him with a view to taking him away. I protested, "Hey, what are you doing? Are you taking my baby away from me?" He insisted that that was why he had come, and that this was the "decision". And to convince me, he showed me a decree written in a notebook, saying that he had to take the baby whatever happened. I resisted, and then the

angel gave me a precious piece of jewelry in the form of a cross, and took my baby away.' From that time on, she believed that one day Francis would follow Christ.

Until he was in his teens, the Elder stayed in the village doing various small jobs within the family. When he was old enough to go out to work, he left for Piraeus, and worked in Lavrio until he went into the navy to do his national service. When he came out, he used the modest savings he had put aside to start work on his own. He started as a salesman, and then became a merchant. He operated mainly at the various markets and fairs and had soon made a substantial amount, enough to ensure him a bright economic future. He was hard-working but also humane, and always abhorred unfairness and deceitful practice. However many opportunities he had to get ahead by dishonest means, he never compromised.

The Elder was twenty-three years old and based in the capital when he began studying books about the Holy Fathers. He was struck by their lives, and particularly the strict ascetics. But as he used to tell us, the real impetus towards monasticism came to him from the following dream:

'One night, I dreamt that I was passing by the palace, and all at once two officers of the palace guard seized me and took me up into the palace. I did not understand why and protested, and they answered kindly not to be afraid but to go up, since it was the king's wish. We went up into a quite exceptional palace, beyond any palace on earth, and they dressed me in priceless clothing of pure white and told me, "From now on you will serve here"; and they took me to do obeisance to the king.