



My Beloved Ones,

I would like to announce some wonderful news—not simply for our Metropolis and our Archdiocese, but for the Orthodox throughout the whole world!

Late last week, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I visited the Holy Mountain and offered us a gift, when he announced the canonization of four Athonite Fathers: Elders Ieronymos of Simonopetra, Daniel Katounakiotis, Joseph the Hesychast and Ephraim Katounakiotis.

His All-Holiness' announcement is, to me, a clear indication of the love that he has for his spiritual children. He understands our need for spiritual nourishment, and he has provided this by recognizing those who were the Fathers of today's Monks, who have given their lives, without reservation, to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

For example. Elder Joseph the Hesachyst was born in the late 1800s, and by the time he was in his twenties, his study of the lives of the Holy Fathers had urged him to seek this life of strict monasticism. Indeed, the young man was so zealous for God, that at first, he was deeply saddened when he saw how very few of the monks on Mount Athos shared his devotion to unceasing prayer. However, God soon granted his deep wish, when Fr. Joseph one day felt himself full of light, outside and inside; and understood that the prayer was saying itself.

Having been granted this miraculous experience of the Uncreated Light, Fr. Joseph began to live and travel to the emptiest places, in order to grow spiritually. Meeting a Fr. Arsenios, he found someone who shared his calling, and together, the two young monks discovered Elder Efraim the Barrel-Maker, to whom they practiced obedience. They each devoted themselves to reciting the Jesus Prayer—but Fr. Joseph's desire was so great that even after his Prayer Rule, he still retired to a cave to prayer for more hours.

After the falling asleep of their Elder, Elder Joseph and Fr. Arsenios began to move from place to place on the mountain, in order to live in solitude. Fr. Joseph lived on three ounces of bread a day, sometimes with wild greens, and wore only his old robes. Struggling greatly against the demons, Fr. Joseph fought temptation by keeping vigil, and eventually slept in a chair, and not a bed. As time passed, Fr. Joseph became the elder of his small community, and his faith became well-known, causing him to move his small brotherhood to a cave for solitude.

The blessed Elder Joseph fell asleep in the Lord on the Feast of the Dormition, August 15, 1959. The relic of his head is kept in the Monastery of St. Anthony in Arizona, and the remainder of his Holy Relics are to be found on Vatopaidi. Visitors to Mount Athos

say that his relics give off a strong fragrance, and Elder Efraim of St. Anthony speaks often of the many miracles that have been worked through Elder Joseph's intercessions

Now, all that remains, is for the decision of the Holy Synod, concerning the dates when we shall commemorate each of these Holy Fathers. Until then, may we ask that they all—Elders Joseph, Ieronymos, Daniel, and Ephraim—intercede to God on our behalf, as we seek to follow their examples in prayer, denial and humility.

+ALEXIOS

Metropolitan of Atlanta