

THE BLESSED HEGOUMEN OF THE HOLY MONASTERY OF HOZEVA ARCHIMANDRITE ANTONIOS (+1993)

In eternal remembrance is the righteous...

Blessed Hegoumen of the Holy Monastery of Hozeva

Archimandrite Antonios (†1993)

This year marks thirty years since the sudden and tragic death of the blessed Hegoumen of the historic Holy Lavra of Hozeva, Archimandrite Antonios. Fr. Antonios Iosifidis from the village of Avles Serbion, Kozani, was born in the year 1958 and received the name Apostolos. The third son of pious parents, a child restless in spirit, dynamic, daring, fearless! He had the blessing that his good parents taught him the faith and when they moved to Thessaloniki in 1966, to lead him to the Catechetical of their Parish, Saint Athanasios of Evosmos, where blessed Fr. Alexandros Kalpakidis, later Metropolitan of Stavropigiu, worked a lot on his childhood soul! Fr. Antonios himself wrote:

“[God] took pity on me, Most Merciful and does not want the death of the sinner and he protected me and here is my Elder the great miracle, because now looking behind me with a now clear intellect I remain a speechless fish. Now I understand God’s protection for me, and now I see and say that I came to know Christ through you, Christ spoke in me with your voice, with your sermon and your life was an example for me. ... You had dug into my soul very deep from a tender age and planted the Word of the Gospel which over time with your preaching became assimilated and became second nature and when I wanted to do something good or bad I weighed it with the Gospel, and

that kept me from many great sins.”

Following the call and inclination of his heart, he directed his steps to the Lavra of Saint Savvas the Sanctified in the year 1985 at the age of 27. As a Monk, he was distinguished by obedience, exemplary self-denial, but also respect and love for everyone. She received the first degree of the Priesthood under the blessed Patriarch of Jerusalem Diodoros in December 1985 on the feast day of the Holy Lavra and exactly one year later she received the second degree of the Priesthood. In 1990, he was appointed a Priest in Bet Sahour – the so-called village of the Shepherds – where he won the love and appreciation of the entire Arabic-speaking flock. In the same year, he shows extreme obedience to the Patriarch Diodoros and moves, at the Patriarch’s order, to the Historic Lavra of Hozeva, due to a vacancy in the abbotship. For three years, he offered his utmost in the reorganization of the Monastery, both materially and spiritually. He took care of the renovation of the infrastructure, the maintenance of the existing ones and the reconstruction of new spaces especially Monastic cells. The most important thing, however, was that he proceeded to establish and faithfully observe a Monastic program: a daily celebration of the Divine Liturgy and all twenty-four-hour services according to the Monastic Ecclesiastical Order. The example that he gave to those who lived in the Monastery at the time was a very catalytic argument so that everyone was convinced to follow it!

The thread of his earthly life was cut early, because he belonged to those “which were redeemed from the earth” (Rev. 14,3). On December 14/27, 1993, after the end of the Divine Liturgy, during manual work in the Monastery, “... **suddenly... a deafening bang... My God, what a terrible crash... Loud noise, as if something had collapsed and a thick cloud of dust... With a lightning leap his spiritual Son{Fr Germanos} rushes into the room. The wall has given way, or rather, a section of the rock has come off and crushed the Geronda, leaving his head intact!**

... Fr. Antonios is fully conscious and talking! ...Without hesitating for a moment {Fr. Germanos}, or being discouraged by the volume and weight of the granite boulders, he begins to grab them one by one and throw them over with his hands, in a superhuman effort to free the injured. When he succeeds, he carefully picks him up and carries him, as gently as he can, to a bed. He sees no signs of external injury, but the Geronda, with difficulty, repeats:

-“It hurts... it hurts... in my back...”

Father Germanos is really starting to get scared now! Perhaps for the first and last time in his life, he, the lion-hearted man, experiences what “fear” means!... Later, in the taxi, he holds him tightly, but carefully so as not to hurt him and Germanos is afraid! He is very afraid now because he hears something like heavy breathing and the Old Man’s breathing is making it difficult... making it difficult... getting heavier and heavier... until it stops completely.....!”

As St. Gregory of Nyssa says in the funeral speech of St. Meletius of Antioch, Fr. Antonios “put on his leather tunic, for there is no need for such tunics in heaven to be worn, but he adorned himself with garments of the purity of his life”.

Indeed, our brother and father Anthony is among us in spirit! His values and principles, how he lived, his unparalleled obedience and his Monastic alienation, his dynamism and spontaneity, are our “lamp at our feet”. In our difficulties we invoke his wish, we try to think what he would do, how he would answer, how he would react... His bravery moves us, his love for his neighbour, his merciful heart pushes us to imitate him. His asceticism teaches us... His Monastic renunciation guides us... The optimism and Divine Love that flowed from what was said and done under him, flood us with the joy and expectation of the common Resurrection of the sleeping!...

May his memory be eternal!