

THE REPOSE OF SAINT NEKTARIOS

—Commemorated November 9th—

As he neared the end of his earthly life, Saint Nektarios developed an infection of the bladder, which he endured patiently and with thanksgiving to God for fifteen consecutive months. Despite the unbearable pain, he initially did not want to receive any medical treatment; however, he eventually agreed after much pressure from the nuns. Thus, accompanied by two nuns, he went to Athens and was admitted to the Areteion Hospital, where he remained for more than fifty days, during which he ceaselessly praised, thanked, and glorified God. In the final week he developed a fever that took a toll on him, and having received Holy Communion, he gave up his soul peacefully to the Lord at 10:30 pm on November 8th, at the age of 74.

A few hours before the Saint passed away, the monastery on Aegina received a message via telegraph indicating that there had been an improvement in his health, something that brought much joy to the nuns. When the Abbess Xeni was informed of the telegraph, however, she told the nuns that they were rejoicing in vain because His Eminence was in fact not well, and that he may have even died already—for, she had seen him that same evening with “the eyes of her soul” in the monastery’s courtyard bidding her farewell with the following words: “I came to say goodbye. I am leaving now. Farewell.” The nuns became unsettled, not wanting to believe the Abbess’ words. The truth of her prophetic statement, nonetheless, was confirmed a short while later when a second telegraph arrived announcing that the saint had departed from this life.

While he was hospitalized in Athens, a nun from his Holy Monastery had the following vision: She found herself in a beautiful, open field where there was a newly constructed palace, built with finely chiseled stones. She then noticed that an aristocratic young man was inspecting the structure for potential imperfections. Having ascertained that it had been completed to perfection, he began to lock up the entrance. As the nun stood wondering who this palace could possibly belong to, the young man turned to her and said, “It belongs to Nektarios.” However, because the nun thought to herself, “Where did His Eminence find such a palace? He is poor...” the young man replied to her query

in a serious tone, “It belongs to Nektarios.” One week later, the nuns learned that the saint had fallen asleep in the Lord in Athens.

Approximately one year prior to the repose of our holy father Nektarios, a nun from his monastery had a vision during which she heard a voice stating, “the Father is departing toward the heavenly dwellings, wherein the pure melody of celebrants exists.”

Yet another nun, during that same time period, had a vision of a young man, who was dressed in gold garments, and resembled a general. Having presented himself, he stated that he was looking for His Eminence. When the nun asked him, “why do you want him?” he replied in a serious tone: “I can no longer leave him here because he belongs in Heaven; we have left him with you long enough.”

On the night the saint passed away, a pious and God-fearing lady from Pereiaus saw the sky full of gold-woven clouds, and a dove flying upward through these clouds. Simultaneously she heard a voice saying, “the dove of Aegina has flown away.” This undoubtedly was confirmation that his pure soul ascended from this transient, earthly life to the eternal, heavenly one.

Moments after his repose, an indescribable fragrance started to emanate from his body, a fragrance that was sensed by everyone present in the room and all who approached him. And shortly thereafter yet another miracle followed: In the same room, there was a patient in the next bed who was paralyzed from the waist down. When the nurses and nun Euphemia, who were preparing the saint’s sacred body, placed his shirt on the adjacent bed, the man immediately became well.

Subsequently, one of the attending nurses named Stasa Kalokagathou, whose husband was suffering from an incurable disease, kneeled down before the sacred body of the saint, and used a cotton ball to wipe a bit of the myrrh that was exuding from his forehead. She then proceeded to anoint her husband with this myrrh. He instantly felt an electric current passing through his body and bellowed a loud cry. Then, he let out a sigh of relief and stood up, completely

healed. Overjoyed, he accompanied the funeral procession all the way to the island of Aegina, and he remained kneeling throughout the entire funeral service.

The saint's venerable body remained in the hospital room for eleven continuous hours before being moved to the hospital chapel, where he remained for another two hours. At 11:00 am the next day, November 9th, the casket was placed in a carriage and transported to the harbor in Peraius in order to be taken by boat to Aegina. Along the way, the procession stopped briefly at Holy Trinity Church in Peraius, at which time the casket was opened for people to pay their respects. Everyone then noticed that a fragrant myrrh was exuding like sweat from his face and skin, and everyone who happened to touch his body had this fragrance remain on their hands for days. The myrrh pouring forth like perspiration in the form of pearl droplets appeared on the Saint's visible body parts: his face, his neck, and his hands. Furthermore, his hair was also drenched with this fragrant myrrh. This aromatic exudate remained visible as he was being transported to the island of Aegina and right up to the moment he was buried.

The chaplain of the Holy Trinity church in Peraius, Fr. Alexandros Psychogios, who was part of the funeral procession and who accompanied the Saint all the way to Aegina later related: "When he was brought to the Cathedral of the Holy Trinity, the church filled with an indescribable, divine aroma. This extraordinary phenomenon persisted during the journey from Peraius to Aegina. And when we returned from Aegina, this very same fragrance had inundated the entire ship."

When the casket arrived on the island of Aegina at approximately 3:45 pm, clergymen, officials, young students along with their teachers, and other inhabitants of the island were waiting at the harbor with tears in their eyes, and flowers and censers in their hands, while the church bell-towers were ringing solemnly. More than two hundred men present began to quarrel over who would carry the casket to the monastery, which was located approximately 6 kilometers away. It became necessary for the mayor and the more-composed men to intervene by assigning the crowd into groups of four, so that everyone could take turns and have the opportunity to carry the sacred body on their shoulders. All the men who carried the casket found it very easy to lift, and some exclaimed from time to time, "I don't feel any weight ... He's light as a feather ..." When they

finally arrived at the monastery at the end of the long journey, another miracle took place: As Hieromonk Savvas¹ attempted to position the *petrachili* and *omoforion* around the deceased's neck, Saint Nektarios tilted his head forward to allow for their easier placement, and in following he moved it back to its initial position.

This is how the Rev. Fr. Angelos Nissiotis events describes the events surrounding the repose and burial of Saint Nektarios:

On the morning of November 9th, 1920, I was informed of the passing of Saint Nektarios and I was asked to accompany his body to Aegina as quickly as possible, because the ever-memorable Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, Dean of the Rizarios Theological Academy at the time, wanted to honor him by holding the funeral service at the seminary chapel and burying him within the school's courtyard. However, nun Euphemia of blessed memory, who attended to the Saint during his illness and stay at the hospital in Athens, asked me to transport him to the monastery before any such resolutions were made, so that he could be buried there as the founder of the monastery. This is indeed what we proceeded to do. We transported the casket with the Saint's body via Singrou Boulevard to Pereias. There, we placed his body in the narthex of Holy Trinity church, where he remained for several hours until the arrival of the steam ship "Pteroti," and when it arrived we placed him on board reverently. One elderly gentleman who was 105 years old was crying out that "the island has lost the source of its prosperity."

It is also worthy of mention that for six consecutive months after Saint Nektarios' repose, no patient was assigned to the same hospital room because the room in which Saint Nektarios passed away was continuously emitting a fragrance.

A certain lady who had never met the Saint while he was alive related that her husband, who had little faith and reverence, happened to be present when his body was being transferred to Aegina. When her husband kissed the saint's right hand, he was awestruck because he felt it to be warm and soft, and

¹ This is the well-known Saint Savvas of Kalymnos, who was canonized by the Orthodox Church in 1992.

henceforth he became more faithful and pious. As this lady rejoiced exceedingly for her husband transformation, she simultaneously was somewhat sad because she herself did not have the same opportunity to venerate the saint's body. In this state of disappointment, that same night, she had the following vision while asleep: She found herself within a certain church, where she noticed His Eminence standing at the royal door, vested as if serving the Divine Liturgy and enveloped in a brilliant light. As she gazed at him, she heard the faithful within the church exclaiming: "Nektarios has become a saint!" She then passed through the crowd, drew near to His Eminence, and having received his blessing, departed with insurmountable joy. After some time, she visited his Sacred Monastery on the island of Aegina in order to venerate the saint's grave. When she entered the chapel and encountered a photograph of him, she was astonished at the resemblance, because as already mentioned, she had never met him when he was alive. During another point in her life later on, when this lady was passing through a certain difficulty, one day she complained to God for allowing to suffer unjustly. That very night she saw His Eminence, who "placed his hand on her mouth and told her to remain silent."

According to the testimony of the nuns, after the saint's burial, Saint Savvas of Kalymnos remained over the grave of St. Nektarios for three consecutive days and nights conversing with him. Then, having requested from Abbess Xenia that no one disturb him for the next forty days, he remained locked up in his room, where he completed the first icon of the Saint. Having fasted and prayed, he was informed irrefutably from on high concerning the holiness of the Hierarch. Thus, when the forty days had passed, he went to the Abbess, handed her an icon of St. Nektarios, and instructed her, "Take this icon and place it on the *proskinitari*."² "How can I place the saint on the *proskinitari*," the Abbess replied reluctantly, "since the Church has not yet officially canonized him? As you know, there are committees and Metropolitans who carry out inspections. Do you perhaps, Father Savvas, desire to have our monastery shut down?" To this Saint Savvas responded, "You are obliged to obey, to place the icon on the *proskinitari*, and it is not necessary to scrutinize God's decisions and volitions."

² *Proskynitari* is an icon stand.