

CONCERNING PATIENCE IN TIMES OF SORROW

—Saint Ephraim of Katounakia—

What can I tell you now? I will tell you something from my life that is very private. But out of love, because you are my nephews, I will reveal it to you.

I have a skin condition that is called eczema. The wound that I have on my leg has been there since I was fifteen years old. I tried using many different medicines, but to no avail. As I got older, the condition became much worse. When I sit on my bed, I refer to it as “the bed of pain.” I cannot sit down the way you sit. After sitting for a bit, I can no longer remain sitting ... the blood begins to flow down my legs and the wound becomes more painful. So I started to use a pillow to elevate my legs, and this helps the blood return and alleviates the pain. This is how I would try to relieve my pain at night.

But after continuously sitting in this position, I developed a pilonidal cyst. When I bring this to mind... it is the most horrific thing you can imagine, so to speak. There is excruciating pain! How is it possible to sit? How can you sit down? If you sit down on the bed, you can stay in that position for only so long; then you have to turn a little to the left, afterwards a little to the right in order to find relief. I would endure patiently. After turning to the right, my buttock would start hurting. After half an hour, it would become painful, it started to sting, in a way warning that a wound would form. So then I would turn to the left. But again, after half an hour my left buttock would begin to sting and itch, it would become very tender, forewarning that an ulcer would soon develop in that area. So... no matter what way I would sit—normally, to the right, to the left, even lying on my back—there were indications that an ulcer would soon form. How could I sit or lie down? I tried lying face down as well. But can you be comfortable lying face down?

Patience, patience, patience, patience that’s what I would do. Patience... until one time I could no longer endure it, and I fell into despair. Just

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recalling this state of despair is horrific. It is a foretaste of hell; a taste of the eternal torments, so to speak. This lasted about six-seven minutes.

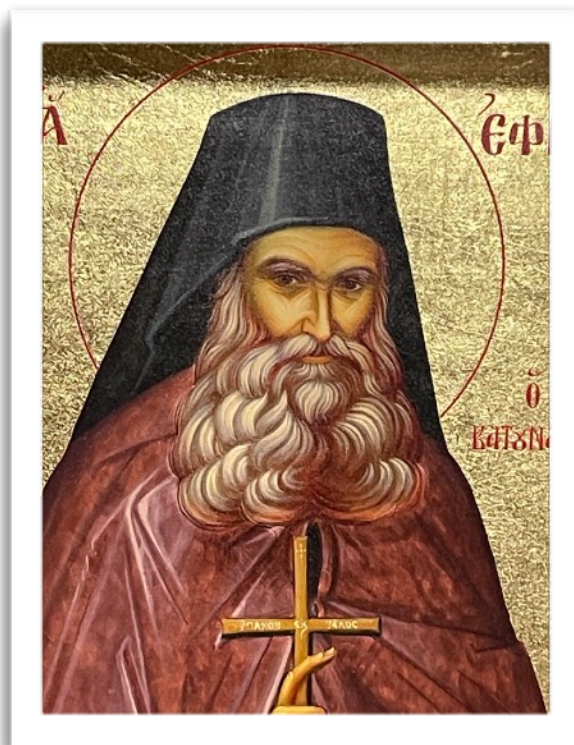
While in this state of excruciating pain, in this state of despair, in this state of hopelessness that I was experiencing, I made no mention of anything to the monks of my brotherhood. Unexpectedly, I heard a delicate voice, something like a gentle breeze, so to speak, saying: “This is what God wants.” As soon as I heard this, I was able to make a sigh of relief. “May it be blessed! If this is how God wants me to be, may it be blessed.” But grant me patience as well, because I cannot endure this any longer.

What was I to do? Should I go to have surgery? Everyone was advising me, “go have surgery... go have surgery.” But how could I go? I needed to get into a vehicle to drive down to the port. Wouldn’t the car ride be very bumpy and shaky all the way there on the dirt road? In this state of desperation, I got up and went to the vigil lamp of the Panagia. The vigil lamp of the Panagia performs miracles too. I dipped a piece of cotton in the oil, I went back to my room, and I anointed myself in the location of the pilonidal cyst, and in the affected areas on my right and left buttocks. This was day one. The next day I did the same thing. On the third day, everything disappeared. The Panagia performed a miracle! Now I can sit for hours on end. I have no pain in my buttocks or where the pilonidal cyst used to be.

And this serves as confirmation, so to speak, of the things stated within the books of Elder Joseph the Hesychast and of your Elder from Philotheou as well: “be patient in times of sorrow.”

The protection of the Panagia is always present, but we do not perceive it. It becomes apparent to us when we are about to fall into a chasm or into the abyss. When we are about to fall off a cliff, that is when the protection of the Panagia becomes visible to us, and it prevents us from falling into this bottomless pit, so to speak.

But this is not all. The most significant thing is that when everything stopped, on the third day when all my pain disappeared, a certain joy was circulating within me. It was a sort of revelation that God, on account of His tremendous love, on account of His immeasurable love, revealed His love by giving me this wound on my lower leg. And I could not stop thanking Him, glorifying Him, praising Him, and expressing my gratitude to God for giving me this wound. As a sign of His love, he gave me this wound on my leg. And I could not stop; day and night I was full of joy and continuously glorified Him: “Your great love was manifest in this manner. How can I worthily praise You? How can I thank You? How?... Your love was shown to me the wretched and filthy person? You, O God, the infinite One, the eternal One, the endless One, decided to love me? What good did you see in me? I praise and glorify Your glory, I praise and glorify Your mercy, I praise and glorify Your compassion!” That is what I said. Now I can no longer speak in this manner. I can no longer say such things. This lasted three days. After three days it stopped.



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