

SERMON ON THE FEAST DAY OF ST. GERASIMOS OF CEPHALONIA 20/10/2019

St. Gerasimos was born in Trikala, of the Corinthian eparchy in 1506. His father, Demetrios, was from an aristocratic family in Constantinople. St. Gerasimos was raised and educated as a member of the ruling class at that time. When he was 20 years old, he decided to go to Zakynthos (Zante), a great center of education in that period.

His love for Christ inspired him to go on pilgrimages to the most important monastic centers of the day. After visiting Constantinople and receiving the Ecumenical Patriarch's blessing, he went to the Holy Mountain of Athos, where he became a monk. St. Gerasimos stayed on the Holy Mountain for a long time, in an isolated Skete (a smaller monastic community) with a goal to venerate the Holy Sites. The Patriarch of Jerusalem was impressed with Monk Gerasimos' personality and ordained him to the diaconate and priesthood. St. Gerasimos' constant desire was to meet many great Ascetics and Monks, in order to learn lessons from their saintly lives. To this end, he visited the Holy Monastery of Sinai as well as other centers of monasticism, like Thebais (or Thebaid) in Egypt.

In 1548, St. Gerasimos returned to Zakynthos, after experiencing much from these great ascetics. In his quest to imitate their lives, he first retired to a cave in Zakynthos, and then later on the nearby island of Cephalonia. After living in the cave for 6 years, he decided to establish a monastery. It was there that the faithful began to come from all around for confession, spiritual guidance, to hear him teach and beg him for prayers to be freed from multiple serious illnesses.

By his saintly life, and the many miracles that were taking place through his prayers, he became famous throughout the Christian world. Additionally, after his repose, his relics were found to be incorrupt and fragrant. Christians who venerate his holy Relic and seek the Saint's intercession continue to experience miracles.

St. Gerasimos belongs to the group of saints called *Hosioi*. *Hosioi* are those Monks and Nuns who have spent their lives in monasteries/convents or Ascetics and Anachorites who removed themselves to deserted places and lived in simple poor dwellings (or even in caves). Their single goal was to dedicate their whole lives to Christ out of great love for Him. They did this by unceasing prayer, minimizing food and sleep, and struggling to strictly practice all of Christ's commandments. In so doing, they aimed to imitate Christ Himself in their lives and reach *Theosis* (the likeness of God). This struggle is based in humility, love and a sacrificial spirit for the sake of Christ. They do this "*until Christ is formed in them,*" as St. Paul writes (see Galatians 4:19), sanctifying them and making them like Angels on earth. This strict ascetic life cleanses them from human passions and sins; it enlightens them to think and act according to the will of God; and it provides for them the Grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit in abundance.

It is these gifts that *Hosioi* Fathers use to grow the spiritual life of the Church. With their God-inspired writings and guidance that they offer to those who come to them, they give great support, comfort and strength to the faithful. Their prayers for the sake of the whole world are priceless. The miracles resulting from their intercession are a great blessing for those who come with faith in God. This is what has been happening for centuries at St. Gerasimos' Church in Cephalonia, where the complete holy relic of the saint can be found. From all over the world, many people with various problems come to venerate the holy relic and ask for his grace. Among them are people who have been freed from domination by the devil and healed.

Learning about the lives of the *Hosioi* is a great help to us in many ways. By seeing their strict fasting (for whole days at a time), we realize that the light fasting that the Church established in comparison is not impossible. When we see the *Hosioi* living a simple life, without all of those things that we in the world consider essential, we can understand that we should not be distressed if we lack some of the goods that our consumer society entices us with. If the *Hosioi* are praying day and night, than we can at least devote an hour a week to go to Church, and say a short prayer every day in the morning and evening!

My brothers and sisters, May the saintly Figure of *Hosios* Gerasimos, and all of the holy fathers and mothers, be for us an inspiration in our struggle to reach sanctity. As St. Paul the Apostle writes: ***this is the will of God - your sanctification***” (1st Thessalonians 4:3).