

## **“Father Porfyrios”**

To talk for a saint you have to be a saint. So we are not in the position to talk for the memorable Father Porfyrios, who is undoubtedly a saint. We dare to talk about Father Porfyrios motivated by duty and gratitude towards him; but also because we love our brothers.

I was blessed by God and so I met Father Porfyrios in 1969, in the church of St. Gerassimos in the Polyclinic of Athens, next to Omonia square. At that time I had just got the diploma of Divinity. Without a doubt, a meeting I had with Father Porfyrios in the Holly Sanctuary, after the Holly Liturgy for Virgin Mary’s Annunciation on the 25th of March of the same year, was the greatest blessing for me. I met a saint, a prophet, a real man. After too many hours of praying I had been prepared to make a full confession and to be given an unerring advise, as much as it was possible, for my life.

Before I started talking, Father Porfyrios having the Holly Spirit “saw” all my life and for first time I felt such a change inside me that I became distracted.

The past turned to be present, the future present and the things that were in a long distance came closer. I was strongly convinced that living without Christ is in vain.

As a result strength was given to me from above to despise the present as ephemeral. I also decided to go to the Mount Athos to get help from above, in order to love Christ and overcome death. Nothing was important to me and Father Porfyrios had been touched and he gave me the tickets to go to Mount Athos. “Go up there”, he told me, “and I will be with you spiritually; there are no distances for Christians”.

Since then Father Porfyrios was with me in my mind, helping me during the difficult hours of my spiritual fight, and the great temptations. Whenever a chance and blessing was given to me I went to meet him and to ask for his help. I listened to his convincing paternal words with great respect and I used to feel so much his love and affection. He never praised me. He always used to say: “It’s your fault. Pray for your brothers. Ask God to give you holy modesty and to make you able to love him”. Once, I thought that Father Porfyrios gave me wrong on what I had told him. He used to tell me: “You are right, but you are not. A Christian is never right. He must always blame himself”. The right belongs to the people of this world. So, there was not the slightest chance to condemn anyone.

Now, that Father Porfyrios left the present life, I invoke and look for him many times, in hours of great temptation and especially during the times of curing the heavy crucifix, that he gave me because of his great love and modesty.

When I say the heavy crucifix, I mean to be a spiritual father at his Convey. I ask him to give me patience in front of the temptations, modesty and love.

The speech, which follows, is not rhetorical. It is inspired by the life's pain, spontaneous and at less after a lot of sorrow. For this reason, the speech gives emphasis to certain parts of Father's life, which (talked) helped me too.

Father's life was a model of a Christian's life. The way he was driven out of Mount Athos, his rebirth in Christ, his obedience, the way he left Mount Athos, his holy life in this world, his pastoral service, his relationship with the Church and the bishop, the priests and the other confessors, with his spiritual children, the sinners, with his nation and humanity, with our dead brothers, even with those who were in error and the infidels, are an example for us.

"He spoke like he had the power, not like the Scribes"  
" His words are much more sharper than a double-edged knife. "They can even touch the marrow." "  
They have nice taste like having salt". " They taste sweeter than honey and honeycomb". " He could see through the people but nobody could see through him".  
These are words from father to his children.

Because of the limited liturgical time, the speech emphasises whatever God reminded and inspired me at that time and whatever I thought it will benefit the congregation.

It is published - since it was found by chance, recorded by someone unknown, and then written down and corrected - after the encouragement of those people who listen to it, because they thought that it will benefit a lot of people.

We will be happy if someone will be benefit by reading it and call Father Porfyrios's help in his life for the salvation and the whole world's.

The recorded speech was delivered on the 27th of November 1994 at the Sacred Convey "The Transfiguration of Saviour", in Milessi of Attika, during Father Porfyrios's memorial service.

The ancient text with which the speech starts is taken from St. Symeon of Thessaloniki. p.g.155, 692-693 (about our last days). The translation of the above text in English is the following: "Every year a memorial service of a person who has died takes place by those who are near him, and they want in this way to declare that the person is still alive, his soul is immortal and one day he will be renovated. But only when the Creator wants to resurrect his body. People testified that by offering wheat's seeds. As Christ who died in body, resurrected and now lives, so we are going to be resurrected and live.

The benefit that the dead people get by those memorial services has been revealed to many saints. For this reason, people should perform these services with care and by having Divine service. That's why Divine service, among other reasons, has been given to us.

The prayers, the holy sacrifice and the charity to the poor, do not only comfort, release sinners from punishment who died absolved from sin, but also provide great purgation and ascent to those who lived by God's will and died being virtuous as God likes.

Above all we should perform liturgy for those who died. Because during the holy sacrifice the priest cuts a small portion from the consecrated bread which is for the dead and at the same time he prays for him being invisible. With this way he helps him to come closer to the God and participate in the holy Communion.

Thus our brothers who passed away feeling repentance in Christ's name, gain great benefit, find comfort and they are saved.

Even the sacred and divine souls of the saints are delighted so much with these, when they take place for them, and they bound with joy. They join Christ and receive holy communion. They also take part in His gifts with purity, brightness and genuineness. thus they pray for us too.

That's why Christ made and gave us this sacrifice. To become saints, to be guided by God and to be one with him, as we pray.

For this reason the saints beg and pray constantly for those who remember them and they perform liturgy in memory of them and to honour them. The saints become mediators for them to God. They also ask persistently for those who honour them in this way, to be in communion with Christ just like they are.

So, we should perform memorial services for our brothers who died and we have to carry out liturgies for the saints as long as we can. By making them happy in Christ's name, they become pleasant

mediators towards Him and we can be saved by their prayers.

That is what St. Symeon from Salonika says. Most Reverend and dear brothers in Christ's name, the reason we are gathered here today is to carry out the annual memorial service in memory and honour of our dear departed priest-monk father Porfyrios. Those who met him, have got their own experience about his character. So, we don't have anything to say about it. Many people and his prominent spiritual children have written and have made speeches about his life from time to time. However, we have to say a few words.

Apostle Paul says in one of his epistles: "God chose the foolish of this world in order to disgrace the wise men. He chose the weak and the insulted, those who didn't exist to abolish those who existed". On another point he says: "I don't live any more but Christ lives inside me".

A monk once said about Father Porfyrios that God makes known a saint like him only every 100 years. So, Father Porfyrios was not an ordinary person and he does not need our praises not even probably our prayers. He only needs Christ's sacrifice. Because when a liturgy takes place "a synod of the earth and heavens happen" and he is among us invisible and feeling happy like we do. He also gets "the gifts as Saint Symeon from Thessaloniki said above. He gets "the greatest purgation and ascent". He becomes mediator to God and prays for our salvation.

Let's see how Father Porfyrios managed to become a real member of the Church, to live the way Christ lived. When he was alive he had managed to win death, corruption, sin and to join Christ, our real God who was crucified for us and our salvation.

When he was a little child, Father Porfyrios was called by God and left his mother affection as well as his parents' in order to live in solitude and love Christ. Father Porfyrios knew that "every gift which comes from above, the Father of Light, is pure and perfect." He also knew that only if someone is living inside Church and he or she can win corruption and death.

So, he went to Kafssokalyvia, in the seclusion of Mount Athos and in a miraculous way he met his spiritual father on his way from Salonica to Mount Athos. At that time, he submitted himself to him and he obeyed him. As he used to say, he did the "pleasant obedience". He obeyed in whatever he was asked to do,

such as exercise, fasting, work, pray individual and joint vigils at Kyriako.

He did everything with joy. In other words he gave himself to Christ. As he was having obedience and love - obedience is nothing else but love - he became a “voluntary martyr” and that’s because when one of the Venerable Fathers had told him to go to collect snails, he fell ill and since then his health was ruined.

He did not wanted to be among people but he wanted to remain in the desert till his death. As he used to say, he wanted to stay there where he studied the Bible, the holy books and where he used to pray and to watch a nightingale singing in the forest. Father Porfyrios used to wonder “for whom this song is and who is listening to it”. The song is dedicated only to his Creator, to his God”. So when he saw that nightingale he felt that he should have been vanished, that he should not have been existing. For this reason he asked his Venerable Father to go far away in the desert where nobody would know him. His Venerable Father response was the following: “Have you tempted my child? Stay here, otherwise you will not be able to pray and you will loose God’s grace”. Father Porfyrios obeyed him and did not go to the desert.

He also used to tell this story. His Venerable Fathers had told him not to read St. Symeon’s, the new Theologian, book. “Don’t touch that book my child”. They had made it a condition that he would obey. But after the Venerable Fathers had left he was tempted by curiosity, since he was a human being, to see what the book was about. When he opened it, the grace immediately left, since theoretically he had never got it. He could “feel it”, as St. Symeon says, in the above book. The grace is given by having indignity and obedience. When the Venerable Father returned, he confessed the above incident and the grace came back.

Father Porfyrios had the perpetual pray because he had fulfilled Christ’s commands. When he used to talk about mental prayer, he used to say that it did not mean that somebody should sit on a stool, keep his/her breath and do other similar things. It could be accomplished by upholding God’s commands according to God’s words in the John’s Gospel:

“The person who has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The person who loves me, will be loved by my Father and I will love him/her and I will appear in front of him/her..... If somebody loves me, he will keep my words and my Father will love him

and we will go to him and stay with him. The one who doesn't love me, doesn't keep my words". (chapter 14'21,23,24).

In that way the mental prayer comes to our hearts.

Father Porfyrios had the mental quiet, the mental prayer because he upheld the commands. Because of his obedience he obtained all the spiritual gifts. He had never thought to abandon the solitude. But during the time he was an ascetic, he fell ill. Since there were not any doctors who would have been able to help him with his illness, his Venerable Father told him to go to the "world". So after a lot of years he left. His parents had done a memorial service for him because they believed that he was dead. He came to the "world", he met his parents and after getting stronger he returned to Mount Athos. But once more he became ill. Not being able to remain there any more his Venerable Fathers gave him their blessing to live here, in the "world".

After that he came back here, again, to live and to serve Christ's Church. To serve Him and the people. He came having great indignity. He never aimed at this. He got a blessing. He had never planned to come to the world. He wanted to live there, in the solitude. He wanted to worship God there.

When he was on the boat, that brought him to us, he "saw" (at that time he had already been endowed with the gift of vision) his Venerable Father sitting on the pow of St. George's church, praying for him.

"I was crying in the boat with my spiritual brother father Ioannikios and I was praying and begging the saints, those who live in Kafssokalyvia: Saint Kafssokalyvites fathers, who protected me all these years here, protect me also there, where I'll go, from falling into the traps of the world and the devil. Let me stay there pure and clear from all the passions and malice and to be able to worship the God in the world".

When Father Porfyrios came here, he did not aspire to be a priest. That's why he says in his memoirs, he wanted to do something, let's say, crazy: while a girl would pass him, he would tease her so in that way he would have given the impression that he was not good and so the bishop would not want him to be a priest. After a while he changed his mind and he did not do it. He obeyed Bishop Porfyrios of Sina and he was ordained priest by the bishop who gave him his name. How did Bishop Porfyrios decided to ordain him? In one of their discussions Father Porfyrios had revealed a

secret from his monastery, which none knew it. After that Bishop Porfyrios realised that he had in front of him not a young man of 20-21 but a man who was not like the others, who was something rare. He understood that he had in front of him a young saint monk with the gift of vision. So, he decided to ordain him priest. Later on the same bishop gave him the endowment to be a confessor. Father Porfyrios became a spiritual father at the age of 21.

This seems to be against the rules of the Church but it is not really. Our purpose isn't to follow the rules and only the rules. The role of the rules is to help in such away so that nobody spiritually immature will be a priest or confessor. Their purpose is simply to protect Church from mistakes. But although Father Porfyrios was young, he had all the necessary qualifications according to the rules and even more. He had more qualifications than the rules require, he had the Holly Spirit and the grace of Christ and therefore he could be a priest. As a result, Church, by divine dispensation, ignored the rules about the age, allowing him to become a priest. This happened because Church knows which is the best use of the rules, when their typical forms should be ignored and their spirit should be followed. So, although he was young, he became a priest because he was spiritually mature. And as Wise Solomon said: "Discretion and spotless life substitute for age". In other words a discreet young man is equivalent to an old man.

Well, allow me now to talk a bit about how Father Porfyrios served in the world. He served having implicit obedience to Church. He used to say: "When things don't go well with the Bishop, my pray to God isn't enough". For this reason we should obey and have respect for the Bishop, and the Bishop should obey the Holy Synod. Church asks priest and bishop to serve God's people. None of us is important for world's salvation because Jesus Christ is the Saviour. God's grace is the one which saves. And that grace is given through ordination and priesthood.

Each one of the faithful people should obey the priest who his/her spiritual father (confessor), the priest and the abbot should obey their bishop, the monk his Venerable Father, bishops the Holy Synod and all of them should obey Christ. Just like our father, God said on the mountain: "You should listen to Him". \*\*\*

Thus Father Porfyrios followed Church's views. That's why when he went to Polyclinic, a hospital in the centre

of Athens, to serve people there the Bishop of Athens gave his blessing to him. He served as a confessor with Bishop's and Church's blessing quietly and modestly for many years, without being known by nobody, except a few.

But God made him known to the world slowly. It was not Father Porfyrios's intention, because he believed that he was a man of little importance. He performed the sacrament of confession quietly. Furthermore allow me to say something which was Father Porfyrios's basic principle and which you, who had personal contact with him, should have realised.

Father Porfyrios always tried to help people realise that the evil exists inside them. For this reason he promoted the following: "Always blame (criticise) yourself". And every time someone from the world or even a monk asked for an advice or wanted to confess his evil thoughts that probably he had for his spiritual father or Venerable Father, Father Porfyrios did not use to care about what the spiritual father and the Venerable Father had done but he used to advise them: "What you should do, how you can reform yourself, the cause of the evil is inside you".

That's why he used to say that the person who confess should (be modest and critical to himself) have indignity and blame himself. He should always have nice thoughts and make sure that he keeps his soul clear of all the passions of the flesh and spirit, such as envy, jealousy, wickedness, malice, selfishness and all the others which keep us separate from Christ. That's why he said that when you see someone committing a sin you should not accuse him because he is your brother and you should pray for him. Father Porfyrios was conscious of the unity of the human race, in other words he knew that inside Church we are all in "one". He knew it in heart, he knew it by grace. This is something that we can not completely understand. And this how Father Porfyrios had this gift and how he had the spiritual power "to be happy with those who are happy and cry with those who cry".

For this reason when he was praying for someone else he did not use to say: "Dear Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy on your servant" but "Dear Lord, Jesus Christ have mercy on me" because he believed that "me" includes also "you". That all are in one.

See now, with how much love he confronted the people the people who confessed. He never hurt any priest, he

never stood between the spiritual children and their fathers and the monks and his Venerable Fathers. He knew well that the devil fights against the trust that someone has to his Venerable Father. So, Father Porfyrios used to reform those who went to see him and send them back to their spiritual fathers, because through the priesthood's grace, Christ forgave them.

Father Porfyrios did not know that he himself could forgive. He did not believe that he was a man of importance.

I also have to say something more; find out with how much love he behaved to the sinners. Probably many of you have heard in a cassette his story about how he came closer to the sinful women unintentionally during the time he was performing his duties as a priest. Listen how he speaks, how the Christian the saint acts. He acted just like Christ had behaved when the Pharisees brought in front of Him the adulteress and told Him full of vancour: "Through a stone to her, kill her, that's the law says". And Christ said: "The sinless throw the first stone" and everyone left, setting her free. Of course when Christ, saint the sinless, he did not mean the one who had not committed the particular sin, but the one who had not committed any sin. At that moment Christ's grace acted on them and so everyone realised that they themselves were sinners as they were the offspring of Adam, the man who had turn up to be unworthy of God's affection and had demanded autonomy, to be independent of God.

When Father Porfyrios went into those sinful women's house to sprinkle with holy water, it was the Epiphany, the woman who was in charge told him referring to the girls "they can't kiss the cross". Then he answered: "Let's find out who can't; you or them?" and he added: "Let them kiss the cross". After kissing the cross he told them: "My children, today I'm glad that the cross and I came here, and I can see, that you have very good souls, much better than mine, and you can love Christ much more than I love him". After that he said: "Many happy returns, I hope you'll meet him and love him. Good day..." and left crying.

Can you see how tactfully the saint tries to help people who are far from God, who live in sin. He knows, he can feel it with his soul. It is what saint John Damaskinos says in \_\_\_\_\_: "You, the only one who knows the human's weakness, give me Your strength...".

Father Porfyrios had felt Christ's power and he knew that if Christ won't give this power, the man will not be able on his own to win the evil, the sin. The man can't shatter his Ego and his pride with his own power. That's why Father Porfyrios had absolute indulgence to the sinners. He condemned the sin but never the sinner. In this way he helped people to become saints and to come closer to Christ.

The time passes and I do not want you to get tired, but I would like to tell you something more about his life, which is really worth it. You have met Father Porfyrios. So, I won't talk to you about his spiritual gift of vision which all of you or let's say most of you are experienced. Many people have written and Mr Papazahos has talked in many previous interviews about his gift. I'll tell you something which is mentioned in the book "Evergetinos": "From (modesty) indignity comes the wise judgement from the wise judgement comes the gift of vision and from vision comes the prophetic gift and from the prophetic gift comes love. Having acquired all these, man realises that he is far away from God".

Father Porfyrios was in that spiritual condition. That's why he used to say: "God gave me grace to be good". He had not realised that he was endowed with vision to help people. God gave it to him indeed, to help all of us; to help Church, to help the salvation of the people in the Church. For this reason, when his life was close to the end - as he confided in one of his spiritual children - while he was waiting the death, he was constantly saying the following which is read in the Holy Communion:

He was saying this all the time.

When the man approaches God he comes aware of his sins. At that time also he understands who God is and who the man is.

Apostle Paul, reached the third heaven and sacraments were revealed to him says about this:

"Christ came to the world to save the sinners, and I am the first among them" (A' Tem. 1,15).

Father Porfyrios had an almost similar apostolic and prophetic grace. Having the Holy Spirit, he could see the things which happened far away like they were near, the past events like they were present and those which belonged in the future like they were in the present. He could see what there was in the earth, what

there was on the other side of the globe. He was able to see through a man's soul, to see his future, what he would do ten and twenty years later. He could see the souls in Paradise and the souls in Hell.

Although he could see all these, he was modest and did not have self-esteem.

For this reason Father Porfyrios when he was close to death he did not want to remain here because he did not people to honour him. So, when his death was revealed one year earlier - as he had confined to one of his spiritual children - he decided to go to the isolation of Mount Athos. He said: "the time I'll pass away to God comes..." So he went to Kafsokalyvia to end his life, praying to God with indignity and living in obscurity. He had prayed to Christ once, when he saw that nightingale being a young monk to die in obscurity; and he died indeed. Before he died, he ordered the monks who were near him not to invite any other monk (he had many monks as his spiritual children). Father Porfyrios did not invite anyone because he had great indignity. Even if someone had known his death he would not have been able to go to his funeral because there was a big storm in the sea. After the funeral the sea calmed down.

Look how Father Porfyrios's life was ended there. When he felt, a few hours earlier, that his soul was about to depart, he invited his laybrothers and they started reading the relevant prayers on his deathbed. Then he said to the monks: "My children, fall on me, to be saved". That means with your pray fall on me, start praying... And they started praying for him.

To be saved... Who? He, who could work miracles? Once I had a serious health problem and he told me, to encourage me, that someone, who had been crippled and immobile for thirty years with prayer stood on his foot and moved his legs to which the brain had forgotten to give commands. He made him walk. He, who saved so many people, he, who let even the doctors speechless when he was telling them about the structure of the human body and also when he was able to detect the various illnesses with the help of the Holy Spirit.

He couldn't rely on his virtues, neither to his kindness nor to his saintliness, but he used to say to his spiritual children: "Pray for me to be saved". They obeyed him and he consigned his saint soul to God. The time he died, his body showed a sign of his holiness as he was "transformed". As one monk, who was eyewitness, told me, when Father Porfyrios's soul departed, the colour of his body changed gradually. Firstly the colour of his mouth turned into yellow like it is the colour of the

candle and the colour of the saints' relics. Church may canonise him (or pronounce him a saint) whenever of course God will permit it. The canonisation will take place whenever Church decides and wants and not whenever I or he or someone else wants. Father Porfyrios belongs to God. So, God will say when he will be canonised and if he will be or not. Maybe Father Porfyrios doesn't want to be honoured in this life just like many other saints who have lived on Mount Athos.

Another great, dear departed ascetic, who was endowed with similar to Father Porfyrios's spiritual gifts, had said: "Don't exhume me because after the exhumation you are used to calling someone sinner... the other one saint. Only Christ can call someone like this the Day of Judgement"<sup>1</sup>.

For this reason we do not know. Probably FP wants Christ to call him a saint the Day of Judgement..... We have to trust Christ. May Christ and Church do whatever they want.

He left us indignity, criticism, love for our Christ, the implementation of the commandments and obedience to Church. He respected the Archbishop<sup>2</sup> as a person and as institution. Listen to his experience when he was invited by the Archbishop to visit him.

He went to Archbishop's house but since he could not get off the car, the Archbishop got into the car and they talked there. While he had not sweated for two to three months, he sweated then in the car. FP attributed this to the grace of the bishop. Because the Archbishop is the head of the local Church. That's why he recommended us to respect and obey the Church, the present Archbishop and the Holy Synod as it is represented today and each time.

To sum up, we will trust Church and whatever Church wants and whenever wants it and however wants it. Also however God want it.

Let's call FP in our prayers. We believe that he listens to us, he is among us and certainly mediates for our

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<sup>1</sup>The person who said the above is father Tyhon who was ascetic for fifty years in the hut of the Holy Cross in the Stavronikita monastery and he was Venerable Father of the dear departed father Paissios Kappadokis

<sup>2</sup>The speaker has in mind Arhibishop Serafim who FP respected just like he respected all the other bishops of a local Church.

salvation. Let's all of us try to take after him with indignity.

Our dear Lord; may you have glory, power and hounor for ever. Amen.