

May Your Humility Receive My Words, Elder Joseph
A Tribute to Elder Joseph of St. Nektarios Monastery of Roscoe, New York
By His Eminence Metropolitan Saba (Isper)

The monk is a man of prayer. The power of his prayer is shown by the outpouring of divine grace upon him. This is reflected in an inner peace unshaken by storms, and a warmth of welcome and hospitality surpassing the finest manners of the most polished social circles. It is the hospitality of Christ Himself, free from all human flattery and social formalities.

As for the radiant, cheerful countenance that reflects the clarity of heaven and the Kingdom of God on earth, He grants it to some of His faithful ones. I could see all these qualities in the face of Elder Joseph of St. Nektarios Monastery of Roscoe, New York, upon whom many graces from God were manifest. I dare to speak of them now, after he has gone to the dwellings of the Lord.

This is what I saw in you from the moment I met you for the first time, and it increased throughout three years, up to our last meeting. You did not change, nor were you altered. Even the grievous illness you endured in recent years was not an obstacle that prevented the heavenly light from shining on your face for a single moment; rather, it only increased. Nor did your physical pains conceal the gentle, transparent smile on your face!

How ashamed I felt when I learned that you had postponed receiving your chemotherapy by a day or two in order to hear my last confession, especially when I saw signs of fatigue upon you. I asked you then, “Are you in great pain, Father?” And so that I would not worry about you, you answered roundaboutly, with heavenly gentleness and a smile not of this world: “The chemotherapy dose tires me, and afterward, I spend several days as though I were dead!” Your answer was like an arrow that pierced me with the measure of love you carried!

By your conduct, you taught me the importance of faithfulness to the Lord until the final breath. Through you, I came to understand that faithfulness, and the deeds and labors that accompany it, are what draw forth the grace of God. This is what I had also learned from our Holy Fathers; yet in you, I saw it embodied.

From you, I learned that we struggle while knowing that our ascetical efforts do not grant us “merit” before God; yet He, glory to Him, sees our labors for His sake and grants us His grace, which sanctifies our lives and reflects His light within us. You also taught me, Father, that our God does not always grant this grace so that He may preserve us from pride. But what I witnessed in you was that He poured out His grace upon you abundantly and preserved it in you richly, after He saw your labors before Him and your faithfulness to Him.

His grace appeared in you through the joy that marked your face, which you transmitted to your striving monks. We know, Father, that with joy the Gospel of our Lord began: “I bring you good tidings of great joy” (Luke 2:10), and with joy it was also concluded: “And they returned to Jerusalem with great joy” (Luke 24:52). We know that this joy of which the Gospel speaks is joy from God, not from ourselves, yet we often seek it in the wrong places.

But you offered yourself wholly to the Lord of joy, and He in turn granted you this gift, which you tasted to the full. Therefore, we now await you asking it for us, in your love, from the Lord beside whom you have come to stand, that He, through your intercessions, might grant it to us, and especially to your monks, so that your joyful presence may continue among them and, through them, be conveyed to us. This is what consoles your children, Father. I am entirely hopeful that you will not withhold this request from us, knowing how greatly we all need true joy—and that there is no true consolation or gladness except in the presence of the Lord of joy in our midst. You tasted Him best. Your faithfulness to Him and your labors before Him drew His grace upon you in abundance, and your humility preserved it in you always.

O earthly angel, you were the greatest blessing God granted me after my coming to America. You were my greatest consolation in my new ministry. How I will miss you, and how I will miss your advice! Yet, I am confident that your presence in the fathers and monks of the monastery will remain; and within that family, through whom you granted me the blessing of being spiritually one of them, I will find what you always gave me.

Today, after you have been wholly set free and have become entirely His, we all have hope and confidence that He will speak to you His blessed word: “Enter into the joy of your Lord,” for you “were faithful over a little; I will set you over much” (Matt. 25:21). Our consolation for your departure from us is that you now dwell in the light that does not fade, a light whose brilliance will shine in you more and more.

From there, from the Kingdom of God, remember us, the unworthy. From there, I ask you to remember me and the flocks of Christ whose service He entrusted to me, and to forgive me for being unable to attend your funeral.