



SAINT LAZAROS OF MOUNT GALESION – HEAVENLY MAN OR EARTHLY ANGEL

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ABSTRACT

During the thousand years of Christianity, the institution of monasticism interacted with the other Byzantine institutions, being absorbed into the societal life. In the eleventh century, ordinary Byzantines or of the aristocratic class still recognized the superiority of monasticism as a model to follow for achieving the ideal of salvation. What attracted, producing admiration, was the asceticism of the monks along with the benefits that flowed from it for the people. At the same time, the more extraordinary asceticisms were, the more they became the target of criticism. First of all, they were aroused by the misunderstanding of the extraordinary power of a man to control his bodily urges so that the soul would free itself from the bondage of passions. Secondly, the asceticism of some highlighted neglect in the case of others, clerics or even monks, who were too much preoccupied with material interests. Saint Lazaros, as a monk, ascetic stylite, confessor, founder of monasteries, is an emblematic saint for the eleventh century, his life written and lived describing in detail all these struggles and human dilemmas. His asceticism fits perfectly between the two reference axes of the Orthodox system of holiness: heavenly man and earthly angel.¹

Keywords: *Asceticism; Eleventh century; Miracles; Pillar; Angels;*

INTRODUCTION

To make Saint Lazaros known is both easy and difficult. It is easy because his good deeds and wonders, which we so desperately need, have some ease of transmission due to the beauty and hope that accompany them. At the same time it is difficult, because it involves understanding the depth and complexity of the personality of such a man, these being the rock from which the former spring. Saint Lazaros of Mount Galesion is undoubtedly representative of the monasticism of the eleventh century from several points of view², one of these being asceticism.

The importance of asceticism, which transcends time and space due to its primacy as a divine command to perfection³, it resides in its intrinsic connection with the mysterious union with God towards which the human being is oriented. Coming in the closest approach

¹ Sfântul Ioan Gură de Aur, *Omiliile despre pocăință*, translated by Dumitru Fecioru, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1998, Ediție Electronică Apologeticum, 2005, “Omilia a II-a”, p. 17.

²Rodica Elena Soare, “Sfântul Cuvios Lazăr din Muntele Galesion, reprezentant al monahismului bizantin din secolul al XI-lea”, in: *Biserica Ortodoxă Română în timpul patriarhului Nicodim Munteanu: cultură, pastorație și filantropie*, Conferința internațională „Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească”, ediția a II-a, Constanța, 28 oct. 2019, ed.: Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Editura Universitară, București, 2020, p. 185.

³ Genesis 16:16-17.



to us, to show us the Way, the Son of Man was the ascetic example he also taught. The first Christians lived intuitively ascetic lives, with the living memory of the model seen in Christ and under the imminence of His second coming, for which they "trained" like athletes, according to the advice of the Apostle Paul. The momentum of the ascension of the soul towards the kingdom of heaven has placed in the background the pleasures of the material world that rule the body and that Christians have begun to give up. Clement of Alexandria and Origen used for the first time the name of asceticism, ἄσκησις, for the abstinence practiced by Christians⁴.

From the primary Christian communities were detached those who wanted to dedicate themselves entirely to God by practicing with more zeal the asceticism and thus monasticism was born. Asceticism was practiced and sublimated in the monastic way of life, becoming iconic for monasticism, being also the guarantor of holiness in general and for the saints among the monks especially.⁵

Ordinary asceticism implied fasting, abstinence from intimate approaches, renunciation of possessions, wearing the necessary minimum of clothing, vigils, keeping the commandments, permanent control of thoughts, continuous prayer. Passed through the prism of the local cultural, spiritual and social background, asceticism presented other unusual manifestations of the mortification of the body, such as retreating in tombs, hollows, caves, trees or pillars or living only under the open sky. Other ascetics adopted a behavior of "fool" for Christ or wore iron objects on the body. Even ordinary abstinence had a more drastic character: giving up rest or resting on a special chair or especially harsh fasting. Their variety and novelty led to the need for explanations and guidance for their use for the benefit of spiritual perfection. The subject of asceticism occupies an important place in the library of Christian writings, being amply treated by saints such as: Gregory of Nyssa, Athanasius the Great, Nilus the Ascetic of Mount Sinai, Basil the Great, Simeon Stylites the Older, Diadochus of Photike, John Cassian etc on the basis of personal experience.

1. THE ASCETICISM IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY

In the eleventh century, the asceticism preserves the two perspectives acquired since the Christian beginnings of its practice: the internal one, oriented towards God, which directly concerns the ascetic who practices it from the desire of his own perfection, and the external one, directed to the people, through which they indirectly use the charismas acquired by the ascetic. Asceticism is thus a way of manifesting the divine providence, which acts through a man, who willingly gave up the world in order to regain it for Christ.

The ascetics, took over this "war" not as a purpose, but were engaged by society in solving human problems and pains. The characteristic of this relationship of the ascetic with the world is the contradiction with the desire of the ascetic to isolate himself and the fervor with which he is sought and "brought" back into the world by believers. Monasticism was born as a result of this interaction, passing from particular asceticism to institutional form. Asceticism continued to manifest itself within the institutional framework through extraordinary forms and, especially, from purely personal initiative, provoking the perpetual attempts of monasticism as institution subordinated to the Church, to integrate, standardize and sometimes even combat these asceticisms. However, the roles as dogmatic authority, economic engine, provider of social, medical, spiritual assistance, keeper and transmitter of

⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă – Ascetica și mistica*, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1992, p. 7.

⁵Peter Charanis, "The monk as an element of Byzantine society", *Dumbarton Oaks papers*, vol. 25, 1971, p. 63.



religious traditions, which monasticism has played in society, are strictly due to the holiness acquired through extraordinary asceticism.⁶ These roles provided monasticism with an important status among the Byzantine institutions. Institutional credibility, along with the personal one, strengthened the authority and appreciation of the ascetic monk in society, adding in the eleventh century a final role, the political one.⁷

From the end of the tenth century, emperors' affinity for ascetic monks developed as a result of accepting the role of official mediator to God for the imperial family and Empire too, as it had been until then for the common population.⁸ As a result, the emperors founded the imperial monasteries, providing the necessary conditions for the monks for the ascension of prayers and, at the same time, preparing their place of eternal rest. These monasteries were endowed with movable and immovable property, enjoyed tax exemptions and annual annuity. The eleventh century is the century in which most monasteries were founded under imperial patronage, endowed accordingly, architecturally lavish, and privileges were granted to those who were not imperial.⁹ The tradition of the imperial monasteries was perpetuated, so they kept this status even after the death of the founder, the privileges being reconfirmed by the next emperor. Even in cases when the emperor in office was the usurper of the founder emperor, the imperial status of the monastery was respected with holiness, the privileges not being abolished, but only adjusted.¹⁰

The relationship between monks and emperors surpassed the material aspect, becoming one of spiritual kinship, father – son. Based on the trust thus consolidated, the monk also became a counselor in political matters¹¹, or accompanied the emperor in battles, facilitating the victory.¹² In fact, according to this model, not only the emperors, but also the officials and aristocrats visited the ascetic monk, asking for advice on very diverse issues, from spiritual problems to a possible ascension to the throne.¹³ Thus, the prestige of the monks in front of the laity, regardless of the social class to which they belonged, reached its peak in the eleventh century.

The respect they enjoyed throughout Byzantine society and their involvement in all areas of life, however, also had negative effects. On the one hand, the rich gifts of emperors and aristocrats offered for spiritual services, on the other hand, the territorial losses of Asia Minor, attracted to cities, especially to Constantinople, gregarious monks and false ascetics who had no connection with monastic life. They wandered on the streets of the Great

⁶Rodica Elena Soare, “Monahismul răsăritean, de la asceza particulară la forma instituțională”, in: *Istorie, cultură și mărturisire creștină în societatea europeană*, Conferința internațională „Biserica Ortodoxă, statul și societatea românească”, ediția a III-a, Constanța, 24-25 mai 2021, ed.: Constantin Claudiu Cotan, Editura Universitară, București, 2021, p. 82.

⁷Rosemary Morris, “The Political Saint of the Eleventh Century”, in: *The Byzantine Saint, Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies*, Sergei HACKEL (ed.), St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 50.

⁸*Actes de Lavra. Première partie: des origines à 1204*, Paul Lemerle, André Guillou, Nicolas Svoronos, Denise Papachryssanthou (eds.), Édition P. Lethielleux, Paris, 1970, pp. 113 and 250.

⁹Cyril Mango, “Les monuments de l'architecture du XI^e siècle et leur signification historique et sociale”, in: *Travaux et mémoires 6, Centre de recherche d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance*, E. de Boccard, Paris, 1976, p. 352.

¹⁰Alan Harvey, *Economic expansion in the Byzantine Empire, 900-1200*, Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 82-84.

¹¹Michael Psellus, *Chronographia*, translated by E.R.A Sewter, Yale University Press, New Haven, 1953, <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/basis/psellus-chrono07.asp>, p. 257.

¹²Barbara Crostini, “The Emperor Basil II's cultural life”, in: *Byzantion* vol. 66 – 1, 1996, p. 78.

¹³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion: An Eleventh Century Pillar Saint*, in *Byzantine Saints' lives in translation*, Washington D.C., 2000, Ch. 230, p. 579.



City selling expensively their prophecies to those who wanted good news and exalted themselves on their praises.

On the other hand, the participation of monasteries in economic activities through their wealth, especially agricultural land, also the practice of chartistike, favored the penetration into the monasteries of the worldly spirit of material cares. Some of the monks less steadfast in ascetic practice allowed themselves to be overwhelmed by it, leaning rather towards activities and behaviors specific to the laity.

Criticism of false ascetics and “worldly” monks emerged quickly. A text about asceticism belonging to an anonymous monk from the eleventh century, *Logos peri askēseōs*¹⁴, presents non-compliant situations of ascetic practice compared to what he considered a genuine practice. The text begins with a definition of asceticism as “meditation and toil,” based on “abstention from unspeakable deeds and care for the commandments of the Lord”. Only after the fulfillment of these commandments, the ascetic monk could switch to the outer forms of ascetism such as “living in the mountains, retreating into deserted places, closing in houses, eating once a day or even a week, as well as abstaining altogether from bread and water, wearing sackcloth, chaining with iron chains, walking without sandals, lying on the floor and refusing many meetings”.

There were regarded as human traditions and occupying the second place. The author reckoned that those who were preoccupied with practicing external physical asceticisms did so only for praise and rich donations¹⁵, producing envy, gossip and rivalry among fellows.¹⁶ The anonymous monk presents the entire list of sins that some of the monks of that time were guilty of: the love of silver, unclean business, the search for women's company, drunkenness or walking through fairs and markets. The author concludes that he would like the monks to refrain from the evil deeds and keep the commandments of God, only in this way could this state of affairs be straightened out.¹⁷

Out of professional envy, as Professor Paul Magdalino calls it and with the aim of shaking the authority of the ascetics¹⁸, criticism continued in the same tone in the twelfth century: ascetics were characterized as “fraudulent, greedy and superfluous”.¹⁹ Public figures, writers, historians, bishops or canonists, such as Theodore Prodromos, John Tzetis, Niketas Choniates, Eustace of Thessalonica, Theodore Balsamon launched the idea of the need for a reform of monasticism, embedding the life of “extremist” ascetics in common monasteries and the repression of eccentric asceticisms.

History has shown that this analysis of ascetic monks was not entirely justified, generalization being a willful exaggeration. With all the attempts of control applied by church clergy, authentic asceticism continued to be practiced in its superhuman exercises in the eleventh and subsequent centuries, remaining an important component of Byzantine life in general and the foundation of monasticism. The ascet remained unchanged being more or less visible in historical epochs, depending on the publicity that society itself made to him.

¹⁴Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză – un surprinzător tratat în Bizanțul Comnenilor”, in: *Revista Teologică*, 1/2016, Editura Andreiana, Sibiu, 2017, p. 248.

¹⁵Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, p. 252.

¹⁶Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, p. 258.

¹⁷Ioan I. Ică Jr., “Despre asceză ...”, pp. 258-260.

¹⁸Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man in the Twelfth Century”, in: *The Byzantine Saint*, Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Sergei HACKEL (ed.), St Vladimir's Seminary Press Crestwood, New York, 2001, p. 56.

¹⁹Paul Magdalino, “The Byzantine Holy Man ...”, p. 54.



2. SAINT LAZAROS – HEAVENLY MAN

Venerable Lazaros of Mount Galesion (968-1054) is the last pillar saint in the long line of stylites, opened by Saint Simeon Stylites the Elder (390-459). He was born in Asia Minor at Magnesia on the Meander, and practiced this type of asceticism in the same area, on Mount Galesion. Before that, he spent his entire youth in the Holy Land, thus preparing and accumulating ascetic experience. On the way to Jerusalem, he lingered for a while at Attaleia on the advice of an old monk met on the mountain, from which he also received the monastic garb. Also at Attaleia he experienced eremitism in a cave, “fasting, watching and (...) other ascetic, <practices> which he not only fulfilled himself, well pleasing to the Lord, but he also taught the brethren who were with him”.²⁰ Arriving in the Holy Land and entering the Monastery of Saint Sabas, he practiced, following the model of the monks over there, the retreat into the wilderness during the Great Lent.²¹

On his return to his native places from the divine command, he joined the brothers in a small hermitage, Saint Marina asking them to build him a pillar. There is no doubt that this choice was not spontaneous, but long thought out and ordained by the divine prophecy. The old monk from Attaleia, from whom he received advice and the monastic garb, was a stylite. His friend, the monk Paul climbed on a pillar near Laodicea when they parted ways on their return from Jerusalem²², to which followed the pilgrimage of Saint Lazaros to the pillar of Saint Simeon Stylites the Younger of the Admirable Mount.

In search of hesychia, Saint Lazaros left the monastery of Saint Marina and settled as a stylite on Mount Galesion, where he lived on 3 pillars for 40 years. Initially in solitude, a group of disciples gathered around him, and for the small community that grew up, the saint founded a monastery. After this pattern, the three monasteries on Mount Galesion were founded, dedicated to the Savior, the Mother of God and the Resurrection.

Although he was not the only stylite on the mountain or in history, the appearance of Saint Lazaros on his pillar must have been overwhelming for the Byzantines, and for the people of our times, certainly incomprehensible. Only staying on the pillar strikes the human mind, which stops primarily at the implications of the bodily needs – food, rest, shelter, physical movement, not being able to understand the power that marks the ascet on the stone column. And staying on the uncovered pillar, as a seen manifestation of asceticism, itself very difficult, was only a part of the whole ascetism, to which others were added. Like the other ascetics, Saint Lazaros fasted, vigilated, refused any physical comfort and added other extreme asceticisms.

The fasting

Ever since he was at Monastery Saint Sabas, Venerable Lazaros did not drink wine and did not consume oil or cheese. When Saint Lazaros climbed the pillar of Saint Marina, his disciple Gregory the Cellarer mentioned that he ate only legumes soaked in water and sometimes vegetables, always cooked without oil, and three years before he had also given up to the only kind of bread he ate, the barley bread.²³ As a drink, after climbing the pillar of the Monastery of the Resurrection, only because he was old in age did he accept a warm drink sweetened with honey or grape syrup besides the water, once a day, in the evening. On Wednesdays and Fridays he did not eat at all, as in all days of the week of the great fasts ordained by the Church, accepting food only on Saturdays and Sundays, after having initially

²⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 14, p. 92.

²¹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 18, p. 100.

²²Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 24, p. 109.

²³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch.17, p. 99; Ch. 35, p. 122.



wanted to fast completely during the entire Great Lent.²⁴ While he was on the pillar of the Resurrection, it often happened that even in the days ordained to eat, he could not do it, because the devil spilled his dishes with food and drink, and Saint Lazaros did not accept to receive others instead.²⁵

The resting

Begining with his time at Saint Sabas at Jerusalem, Father Lazaros did not sleep lying down, but rested from time to time in a special little chair. In fact, on the entire mountain there were only two beds in the true sense of the word, and those were prepared only for the lay visitors. All the monks rested on ground and only in cases of illness on a stone bed that did not provide special comfort, but only protection from soil moisture.²⁶ Saint Lazaros did not sleep in the true sense, but only briefly awakened, vigil at night, alone or with brothers and praying, so “that the sun set behind him when the vigil began and he sat <there> singing until he saw him again in front of him”²⁷, like saints Arsenios the Great and Simeon Stylites the Elder.

The other types of asceticisms

Saint Lazaros wore iron belts on his body and a harsh tunic of hair that he hardly accepted to be replaced after 12 years of wearing,²⁸ and on earth he walked barefoot.²⁹ Another time, finding out about a sylite woman that she had hung her legs outside the pillar through a hole, he wanted to do the same, considering it was his duty as an ascetic man, to do even more difficult things than a woman. It was hard for his disciples and his mother, the nun Eupraxia to persuade him to give up his plan.³⁰ He also allowed insects such as lice, cockroaches and ants to feed on his body, although they multiplied beyond measure and tormented him very much. Because of this, his disciples cut down the tree on which the ants climbed the pillar even against the will of the Father.³¹ Even when he was sick he did not accept a minimum of comfort, like the cushion that the disciples asked him to use.³²

Through the ascetic exercises, the body of Saint Lazaros regained the transparency of the Edenic human bodies and, with him, the nature around him, showing in all the gifts and words offered by God to human kind and making them visible to all.³³

3. SAINT LAZAROS – EARTHLY ANGEL

The meaning of mortification of the body through sacrifices, renunciations, sufferings is the one given by the Savior Jesus Christ Himself, that of redemption. Like the other ascetics, Saint Lazaros persevered in asceticism for the atonement of his sins and for the cutting off of any tendency to sin. Thus he attained steadfastness for good, like angels,

²⁴Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 8, p.169; Ch. 82, p. 171.

²⁵Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 81, p 169.

²⁶Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch.162, p.252.

²⁷Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 318, p 225.

²⁸Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 82, p.171.

²⁹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 79, p.168.

³⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 59, p.146.

³¹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 222, p.316.

³²Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 208, p. 302.

³³Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă(I)*, Ediția a IV-a, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune Ortodoxă, București, 2010, pp. 428-429.



with whom entering into communion he partook of the knowledge of God³⁴ and imitated them in their main work, that of supporting people in their approach to spiritualization.³⁵

Saint Lazaros's connection with the world of angels defines his entire life, having multiple meanings. The light, characteristic of the angels, marked the beginning and end of the life of the Venerable Lazaros. "A marvelous light shone forth from heaven, and filled the whole house with unspeakable glimpses and glimmers"³⁶ at the birth of the saint, and at his death, "fire descending from heaven like lightning (...) surrounded the church and the pillar; the flame gathered in a <globe> and flowing like water, entered the pillar".³⁷ The light accompanied him throughout his life, showing to the people around him his kinship with the angelic world: the monk Nichiphorus saw "a lightning bolt from the heavens. He turned to the east and saw the church spire that it seemed surrounded by fire; the fire then leaked from there like water, and entered into the Father's pillar"³⁸, Roman, named Skleros who was the *strategos* of the region, saw the father "as a fire when he pulled his head out the window and finding it difficult for him to bear this sight he almost fainted".

The saint's piety and love for the angels was evident: on leaving his native place and on his return he visited the Church of St. Michael the Archangel at Chonae; the teaching he gave to his disciples, commanding them to hold vigils for the Holy Angels; right in front of his pillar were the icons of the Holy Archangels.³⁹ Responding to this love, the Holy Archangels and probably, the entire angelic assembly, accompanied Saint Lazaros in his passage from earth to heaven, this taking place, not by chance, on November 7, the day before their celebration.

The angelic powers of which the Venerable Lazaros was worthy are evident in the struggle he waged against the devil, who often came upon himself and his disciples, trying to stop them from good deeds and deceiving in various ways in order to lose them. The theme of unseen warfare occupies the most of *Life* of the Saint Lazaros. He himself was pursued by the devil in the form of a dog on the way back to his homeland, and in the church of St. Michael the Archangel at Chonae devil tempted him. In order to fool Saint Lazaros, devil often took various forms: as a true angel, a serpent or an old woman who had come to heal him. The devil exhorted the lay people to evil deeds or brought them diseases or possessed them. Nor the monks were exempted from devilish attacks. Some were deceived into having extraordinary charismas, others were pushed to commit great sins. Many were led into dangerous places, endangering their lives. While others were fooled by the thought of accepting easier asceticism at the monastery of Bessai. The power of prayer or even of a single spoken word, the sign of the Holy Cross, the thought and invocation of the help of Saint Lazaros, defeated devil, as once upon a time Archstrategist Michael fought against the power of darkness.

From the same love for people springs the wisdom of his pedagogy, gentle as a whisper of an angel. An example is that of a poor man who came to Father and whom he overwhelmed with mercy, giving him at his request so much that he could not carry them. Seeing himself in this situation, the man understood that he was greedy and that was wrong. On the other hand, the monks were angry with Father Lazaros, because he gave him so much

³⁴Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* ..., p. 440.

³⁵Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologie dogmatică ortodoxă* ..., p. 464.

³⁶Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 2, p. 77.

³⁷Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 252, p. 361.

³⁸Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 86, p. 177.

³⁹Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion*..., Ch. 253, p. 363.



of the resources of the monastery, and judged the poor man for his avidity. But Saint Lazaros rebuked them by telling that it would be better to help him carry all those things than judge him, because the man had suffered greatly because of poverty. He also reminded them the judgment belongs to Lord not to the man. In fact, his monks accused him many other times for decisions that displeased their human reason, regarding the immeasurable mercy of the Father. They were also upset for Saint Lazaros imposed the careful observance of the requirements of the monastic life. Monks couldn't understand his forgiveness high as the divine one, or perseverance on the mountain despite all the adversity. But the consequences of these decisions have shown that the souls of those forgiven many times have been saved by this method, otherwise they were in danger of being lost.

Thus, Saint Lazaros reached the level of love devoid of any passion, sincere, delicate as that of angels, pouring it out on people in various ministries: mercy, forgiveness of sins, advice, healings, prayers, exorcisms, intercession to God and great miracles.

4. CONTESTING THE ASCETIC PRACTICES OF SAINT LAZAROS

The asceticism of Saint Lazaros, due to the superhuman character and context of the eleventh century, was misunderstood and, therefore, sometimes disliked by his contemporaries: on the one hand by the clergy of Ephesus, on the other hand by some of the monks who were disciples of the saint.

The Metropolitan of Ephesus, in whose diocesan jurisdiction Mount Galesion was located, sent various people on several occasions to investigate Saint Lazaros. The subject of this research was the very asceticism of the saint whose possible deviation would have been a good reason to remove him from the mountain. The Metropolitan of Ephesus wanted to force him to move to the Bessai monastery located in a circulated and easily accessible area to attract more pilgrims. But the examination made by these envoys did nothing but confirm the orthodoxy of his ascetism. This was later strengthened by a "distinguished monk" who came from Constantinople at the very moment of the death of Saint Lazaros. Being present at the descent of the saint's body from the pillar and the preparation for burial, he saw the father's body, the coat of hair and the irons with which he had been girded, and he affirmed the authenticity and greatness of his asceticism.

Accusations were also made against Saint Lazaros from a certain monk who had returned from Jerusalem. He told another monk, Photios, who wanted to visit Father Lazaros, lies reinforced with a "stream of insults"⁴⁰ about Father, almost persuading him to turn out of the way. The monk Fotie, disobeying his first impulse to give up, nevertheless went to see Venerable Lazaros. There he was impressed by the sight of the Saint and his holiness. For this perseverance he was even worthy of a wonderful vision of Father Lazaros, who climbed and descended between two great ensembles of buildings, arranged one above the other, which imagined his monasteries on one side and the heaven on the other side. Monk Photios saw how Father Lazaros was welcomed into the buildings that imagined heaven, but he always returned to the people, his words being like honey for them.

Perhaps the heaviest blame was that of his fasting. Father Lazaros was suspected that, although he refused to eat bread, he still received at Holy Communion the larger parts of bread. By coming to monastery, monk Photios above mentioned wanted to convince himself of this first of all. Even some of the monks in the monastery urged the priest who performed the Holy Sacrifice to put Father Lazaros the largest parts in the vessel with which the Holy

⁴⁰Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 84, p. 173.



Body and Blood was taken to him. Some of the monks did this out of superficial compassion, believing that they were doing a good deed. But others did it only so that they could later say that Saint Lazaros was bloated with bread.

Because he often asked his monks for the gold coins they had from donations or from their own inheritances, Father Lazaros was accused of standing on his pillar on a mountain of gold. Although they never lacked anything, but because of the austere life that the Venerable Lazaros imposed in his monasteries, some of the monks accused him of not spending any of this money on monasteries. In fact, the Saint gave this money to the poor of the many who came to ask for his help, at the same time helping his monks to observe with great care the vote of poverty.

His vigil was questioned too. The young monk Neilos, who often fell asleep during vigils, was hit with the palm by other monks to wake up. Being angry because of this, he protested vehemently in front of Father Lazaros, saying that he often saw him sleeping during the service, through the common window between the church and the pillar. With great wisdom and gentleness, Father applied another method to help Neilos practice the exercise of attention for vigil. He allowed the young monk to poke him with a pole whenever he saw him sleeping. Thus, in order to lurk Saint Lazaros, Neilos was awake the entire vigil.

Saint Lazaros argued the mortification of the body and the ascetic practices towards his disciples by quoting the models of the ascetics of ancient times who validated these practices by acquiring the holiness canonically recognized by the Church. An example is resting on the special stool and not lying in bed. Saint Lazaros taught his disciples that it was practiced from the very beginning by the Egyptian monks, according to the angelic inspiration received by Saint Pachomius.⁴¹

5. CONFIRMATION OF THE AUTHENTICITY OF SAINT LAZAROS ASCETISM

Asceticism achieves its goal when the virtues acquired from its practice lead and merge into love. Although its character is primarily spiritual, love acquires consistency through deeds, especially those that show participation in the life of one's neighbor.⁴² Although asceticism implies eremitism, it does not exclude contact between the saint and his fellows, monks and laymen alike. The model of the hermit, which returns after a period of solitude and spiritual growth and founds monasteries for the disciples who inevitably gather around it, is consecrated since the beginning of monastic asceticism. Thus, the asceticism hidden by hermitism becomes visible, not ostentatiously displayed, but revealing itself in its effects.

One of these effects is the acquired grace of miracle-working, of which Saint Lazaros was also worthy. The most common miracles concern the provision of people's food needs. Following the Savior's model, Father Lazaros multiplied bread, wine, cheese or peas in times of shortage. It increased the harvest of beans on the land beside the road when the disciple monks complained that the people who passed by were picking all the beans. Saint Lazaros commanded them to leave those who needed to take, and they hardly let themselves persuaded to go and collect what was left, being sure that there was nothing left in the field. But the harvest was much richer compared to the best years or the situation in which the field was guarded and nobody would take any beans.

⁴¹Paladie, *Istoria Lausiacă*, translated by Dumitru Stăniloae, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 2007, p. 72.

⁴²Dumitru Stăniloae, *Spiritualitatea ortodoxă ...*, pp. 24-26.



From the miracles directed to people there is no lack of bodily or spiritual healings. A man who had suffered an attack from the devil fell paralyzed to the ground. After being taken to the nearby church and sleeping there, as was the custom in such cases, and after being anointed with holy oil, the man recovered, even began to speak, but one hand remained paralyzed and so twisted that his fingers passed through his palm, protruding on the other side. Saint Lazaros healed him in a dream after the man had visited him a few days before at the monastery asking for his help.

Saint Lazaros also showed up to speakers with the saints, even daring to emotionally “blackmail” Saint George. When one of the horses of the monastery was stolen and the feast of St. George was approaching, Father Lazaros told the monks who went to a nearby metochion where they usually celebrated St. George, to tell him that if he does not make the horse appear, they will not celebrate his feast. The next day the horse was found on the pasture near the metoch.

Another miracle on nature was that of the diversion of a very large boulder deployed from the mountain, apparently also by the devilish power, which risked to tear down the cells or the other buildings in the monastery while the monks were inside. At the cry of Father Lazaros, the boulder bypassed the buildings, passing through the monastery without doing any damage.

Following the rescue from the shipwreck of a ship for the prayers through which one of the travelers called the aid of Saint Lazaros, another traveler came on pilgrimage to Mount Galesion to meet the saint, also becoming a believer with a truly Christian life. Saint Lazaros even received the power to prolong the life of one of the monks. Being a person who loved poverty and obedience, he received an extra day of life, wanting to celebrate once again the Baptism of the Lord.

The greatest miracle, as Gregory the Cellarer records, is that of the foundation of the three monasteries made of the dry stone of the arid and inhospitable mountain. Father Lazaros, persevering in the most difficult conditions of life and resisting the devilish attacks, attracted like a magnet those who sought salvation, illuminating their path like a beacon to the monastery. Many of those helped or healed received the monastic robe, others becoming true Christians and living as an example to those around them. The foundation of the monasteries is confirmed as wonderful by the Venerable Lazaros himself, who confessed that it was made following the divine inspiration.⁴³

The foundation of the monasteries is the one that confirms the fulfillment of the purpose of the asceticism of Saint Lazaros, because through these monasteries he has directed his care, attention, love of people not only to his monks, but to all those who have ever asked him in one way or another for help. He remained faithful to his determination to be merciful, a virtue with which he adorned himself from the very beginning. He endured beatings and strife from his uncle and from the notary at the Monastery Strobilion, at the age of 12, for giving to the poor what the two avariciously collected. Later, he did the same with the bread and money received in his travels, annoying the monks who accompanied him. Even his monks did not fully understand that the purpose of asceticism is to discover and increase love for one's neighbor, often reproaching him for the fact that the resources of the monasteries were shared with all those who came to the monastery to receive the blessing. Father Lazaros received these insults and reproaches with the grace specific to his deep humility and with a

⁴³Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 346, p. 247.



joy as intense as his flight from praise from men, humility that fully confirms the authenticity of his asceticism.

The asceticism of Saint Lazaros is closely related to his status as a monk. He himself supported the chinovial model for his monasteries, the emergence and growth of the congregations of disciples around his pillars, supporting this view. Even though stylitism was one of the criticized types of asceticism, Saint Lazaros could practice it in the middle of the community, although it should not be lost sight of the fact that his successive move from one pillar to another was made in order to acquire the tranquility of solitude. Due to its construction and shape, the pillar was built in a demi hermitage in which the saint had a few moments of “removal” from people, without really leaving them. In monasteries, the ascetic rhythm was imposed only by the emphasis on respecting monastic votes, seemingly easy to keep compared to the asceticisms practiced by Father Lazaros himself. However, he constantly reminded the monks that the observance of the votes had to be done with great exactitude. The monks did not have to own absolutely nothing personal, money, working utensils, two pieces of clothes or even icons in their cells, being forced to participate in the absolutely all public activities of prayer, meal, work. However, the monks had the freedom to act according to their will, but they quickly found out on their own skin that the advice given by Father anticipated the consequences of their actions, thus convincing themselves that obedience protected them from many falls. Obedience was cultivated with care and delicacy by Saint Lazaros. The absolutely austere regime in the monasteries was not aimed at leveling the personality of the monks from any point of view. The less trained were encouraged to excel in the work of their hands, and those educated to praise the Lord singing or in prayers, without considering themselves spiritually superior.⁴⁴ Prodigal sons, the monks who had received the robe out of an interest and not from the call and who left the monastery under various pretexts, were seated at the table with those who had not left Father Lazaros. This annoyed them just as in the parable of the prodigal son, but Saint Lazaros turned these happenings into true spiritual lessons.

The freedom to practice asceticism within the monastery was also respected. Saint Lazaros did not impose a harsh asceticism on those who he knew they could not practice, nor did he restrict the truly willing monks.⁴⁵ Although he stopped the extreme asceticisms, his monks found various ways of needing each other, adding them to the obedience they had to fulfill. One walked barefoot in the winter, bringing the water from the spring, and when the Father commanded him to wear shoes, he wore it only a part of road, taking off the shoes again when he was not seen; also, having a long beard, he let it get wet by the water from the spring and freeze, being then ripped off by the wind. Another monk, very much wanting to climb on a pillar and being very young, first received the ascetic test of silence. For this he used to hold stones in his mouth or pretend to be insane, enduring various physical punishments from others. Another monk never sat down, but stood only standing at church services, and in his cell he built a harness to keep him standing if he fell asleep at prayer.

In addition to the cenobitic model agreed by the Venerable Lazaros, he nevertheless allowed some monks to practice hermitism accompanied by a harsher asceticism, similar to his own. After a thorough training in the monastery and long observation, they received the blessing to climb on the pillars according to the model of their Father.

⁴⁴Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 182, p. 274.

⁴⁵Richard Greenfield, *The Life of Lazaros of Mt. Galesion...*, Ch. 181, p. 273.



CONCLUSION

Holiness is humanity's most fascinating achievement, and it cannot be fulfilled outside of asceticism. The anonymous monk seems to forget that keeping the commandments and steadfastness in the good thought that he considered the true ascetic practice, is due to the external asceticisms to which the body is subjected. In Saint Lazaros we have such a typical model of a saint who practiced extreme asceticism on the pillar. The superhuman needs through which he subjected his bodily urges to the soul, at the limit of immaterialization, show the Venerable Lazaros as belonging to the spiritual world to the same extent as the material one. His accession to the celestial heights as an ambassador of mankind reveals him as a householder and “forerunner” of angels in the service of human kind. The name of the *isangelos* given to the monastic life acquires in the case of Saint Lazaros double brightness through the familiarity and piety of the saint towards the angels. Standing on the pillar, between heaven and earth, Venerable Lazaros unites not only angels with people, but also people among themselves in understanding, compassion and love: the coveting monks with the less ascetic, the monks with the poor laymen who come to the monastery for food under the pretext of blessing. By allowing his body to be food for insects and living under the open sky, he also fulfilled the command given to man to spiritualize the entire creation, becoming his master again. Also, the presence of the pillars of Saint Lazaros in the midst of the monasteries demonstrated that the cenobitic model and extreme asceticism are not incompatible according to the criticisms of the age. In fact, none of the other criticisms of extreme asceticism are justified. The resemblance of ascetics to suicides, by considering this type asceticism as unnatural, is forced given that almost all known stylites lived over 80 years, Saint Lazaros dying at the age of 86.

The accusation of vain glory is also unfounded given that genuine ascetics in general preferred solitude over gatherings of people who would have witnessed their miracles and praising them. The Venerable Lazaros even fought a fierce battle to remain on the unfriendly and barren Mount Galesion when the Metropolitan of Ephesus tried to transfer him to the monastery of Bessai, more comfortable, but exposed to the large flow of pilgrims. The most important revelation, however, brought by the superhuman asceticism, is that of the human nature brought by Saint Lazaros close to perfection, adorned with gentleness, warmth, compassion, understanding, forgiveness and an sacrificial and endless love for people.



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