

“Blessed are they who have fallen asleep in the Lord”

The Blessed Repose of our Brother in Christ, Basileios Sklebaniotos

Bright Friday (April 16/29, 2011)

AMID the Light of the Resurrection and the vernal fragrance of renewed creation, and under the protection of the Most Holy Theotokos, the soul of our Brother in Christ, Basileios Sklebaniotos, departed for the true Life. He entrusted his soul, which so loved God and his fellow man, into the immaculate hands of the All-Blameless Mother of God, whose Grace imbued his existence ever since he encountered Christ in a spirit of repentance, living thereafter as a resurrected person.

The funeral, with its Paschal character, took place directly after the Divine Liturgy, which was celebrated by Basileios’ spiritual Father, Archimandrite Gregory Hagiohyprianites. The principal celebrant, His Grace, Bishop Cyprian of Oreoi, delivered a brief funeral homily with deep emotion. Also taking part was Father Jiří Ján, the serving Priest at the Church of the Ascension of Christ, in Patras, where the Divine Liturgy and funeral were celebrated.

Mr. Ioannes Kambisopoulos, a close friend and spiritual brother of the reposed, delivered a wonderfully lyrical funeral oration, which we have published after the account of his life, composed by his spiritual Father, Father Gregory.

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Basileios Sklebaniotos (April 11, 1951 - April 16/29, 2011) was born and raised in Patras. Following his secondary school studies at the Naval College of Ithaka, he became a sailor and travelled for three years. Upon

completion of his military service, he was licensed as a customs officer, a profession which he practiced until the manifestation of his illness.

In 1980, he met Angelike Stolla, who was Roman Catholic at the time. They were married in Patras, in a Church following the New Calendar. Their life was completely worldly and far from the Church.

Their turn to the Church began in 1992, when their seven-year-old son developed a serious health problem. Doctors being unable to offer him any aid, the boy suffered for two years before being miraculously cured after a pilgrimage to St. Raphael in Mytilene, where he was blessed with the oil from the Saint's vigil lamp.



Towards the end of 1993, Basileios felt an intense desire to visit the Holy Mountain and to find an Elder to whom he could confess. In the boat bringing him to Mt. Athos he fervently prayed to the *Panagia* to indicate to him such a spiritual Father. The boat arrived at the Monastery of Esphigmenou, in the courtyard of which he encountered an Elder who made a special impression on him. It was the monastery's Abbot, Father Evthymios, and he confessed to him for the first time. Inspired by the Elder, he embarked on a spiritual life.

At this time, he made the acquaintance of our brother in Christ, Evangelos Koutroubeles from Aigion, who spoke to him about our Monastery of Sts. Cyprian and Justina, in Phyle, Attica, and our parish Church of the Ascension of the Lord, in Patras.

During Great Lent of 1994, he and his wife kept the fast for the first time, even though his wife was still Roman Catholic.

On January 1, 1995, Basileios told his wife that he was joining the Old Calendar movement and would celebrate the New Year [the commemoration of St. Basil the Great, his Patron Saint] by himself, thirteen days later. Shortly thereafter, by the Grace of our Lord, he managed to bring around his wife, who was baptized in April of 1995. Thenceforth, they began to follow the Old Calendar as a family and to live a conscientious spiritual life, with zeal and a keen disposition, as steadfast members of the Parish of the Ascension in Patras.

Basileios was distinguished for his missionary zeal. He spoke at all times and to all about Christ, wishing to lead everyone to the Church. He brought numerous people to the parish, and managed to persuade his brother-in-law to be baptized together with his family, since they were still Roman Catholics.

Basileios had empathy and love for sinners and those who were down and out in life. He would frequently employ them as assistants at his work, so as to give them opportunity to become useful members of society once again. He was very charitable, and would often visit the patients at the home for incurables in Patras.

Thus did the years go by, until December 23, 2010, when he learned that he had a cancerous tumor in his stomach. On January 11, 2011, he underwent an operation during which his entire stomach was removed, since it had been attacked by cancer, and a very aggressive one, at that.

Over the next two and a half months, his condition was relatively stable, but then things began to get worse. The cancer metastasized, and the results of the medical exams were not at all good. When the attendant doctor fully informed him about the seriousness of his condition, Basileios decided to abandon treatment by chemotherapy and to leave the matter with faith to the Will of God. His health deteriorated, his physical strength failed him, and he began to have mobility problems.

In such a condition did we find him the last time we visited him—on Bright Monday, April 12/25, 2011—together with Bishop Cyprian and Father Angelos Mourlas, his former spiritual Father and the former serving Priest at the Ascension Church. He had communed on the morning of Great Saturday and again at his home, following the Vigil for the Resurrection of our Lord.

On Sunday evening, he came down with a high fever, and the next morning his blood pressure dropped to 5. Thus, at noon on Bright Tuesday, he asked to be brought to the hospital. There, his condition improved somewhat with the help of medication. Calm and peaceful, he patiently endured without grumbling, and eagerly followed the doctors' and nurses' orders.

Many people came to visit him—friends, acquaintances, and relatives. He forgave everyone and even gave spiritual advice, speaking constantly of love and forgiveness. He prayed unceasingly, even during moments of disquiet, frequently repeating: “My *Panagia*, illumine my

darkened soul!” He asked his wife for forgiveness for the strain that his illness was causing her.

At noon on Thursday, April 15/28, 2011, he told his wife and her sister-in-law, who were each holding one of his hands: “Come, let me say goodbye, because I am leaving!” and he kissed them with deep tenderness and love. He asked their forgiveness and said: “May God forgive you and the whole world!” Looking towards the Heavens, he added:

“I love all of you. Dismiss from your minds whatever sins I have. Have love amongst yourselves; love overcomes everything! There! I see the Gates of Heaven opening! I see many birds! Let go of my hands, that I might leave....” Addressing his wife, he said, “Let’s get up and go to the funeral!”

Later, he asked her to help him sit up in bed, while she had in her hands the book of P. Soterchos, *The Final Battle of Earthly Life*, and was reading the prayer of St. Niphon for the dying. Without knowing what she was reading, he said to her: “You are reading the prayer for the dying.”

“Yes,” she replied.

“You are doing well to read it; continue!”

At that, the door of the hospital room opened and visitors entered. Among them was his brother-in-law, who informed him that some monastic friends of his would be coming. Basileios told him: “When they arrive, kiss them for me.” Indeed, when they came, he was not able to embrace them himself because he was unconscious and could not communicate.

Later, he became anxious and began calling upon the *Panagia*, Saint Irene, and the Holy Unmercenaries. The nurses came and gave him medication. He fell into a coma, and shortly thereafter gave up his soul, at 6:30 a.m. on April 16/29, 2011—Bright Friday, when we commemorate the Feast of the Life-Giving Spring, in the fragrance of springtime.

Thus did our brother Basileios depart—in profound repentance, reconciled with all, and having



confessed and communed—to meet our Lord in the Light of His Resurrection.

Eternal be your memory, beloved brother in Christ and child in the Lord, Basileios!

† *Archimandrite Gregory*

Funeral Speech for Basileios

12:30 p.m., Saturday, April 30, 2011

Greatly beloved brother Basileios!

We are gathered around you here today, all those who loved you, in the Church that you so loved. Yet it is you who embolden me at this moment of mourning and pain to stammer a few words as a farewell to you on your journey to eternity.

It was you who would give me courage, when we would go together to the home for incurables, and I would remain outside, since I could not bear to face the deformed human beings living therein, whereas you would go inside and nourish them with patience and endurance.

Today, all of us here bow down before you, because you were our superior. For you would stand beside the weak person, your neighbor; you would come to the aid of the victimized and help the imprisoned.

As for us, who yet remain in this life, know that we will keep a lamp burning unceasingly in our souls in memory of you.

Our tears over our loss of you will accompany us all our lives—tears for the person who honored his homeland and his family, and who lived in society with unparalleled dignity.

For many years now, you, our brother, would study Orthodox books and writings with faith and devotion throughout the night, whereby the vanity of this world and love towards others were revealed to you.

Basileios, today you are departing and travelling towards eternal Light. Love for Christ—of Whom I believe you were a soldier—and love for the world will become the two wings that will transport your ethereal soul to the world of eternal Light.

“As the waves of the sea” do human generations come and go. What remains? Love alone: love for one’s neighbor.

I will always remember with what ardor Basileios tirelessly and endlessly analyzed the verse “to do the Will of God” for me, as we travelled one night together (from 11 p.m. until 12 p.m. the next day) to the Holy Mountain.



Our dear Basileios, today, when coffee shops have become schools and schools have become centers of atheism, perhaps you are departing so that you will not see what is to come.

Today, you are turning over the last page in the book of your life—dignified, upright, and honorable—and you leave us in poverty, in the midst of heartlessness and indifference, things which you fought against all your life.

You depart, yet remain for us a living example, like a spiritual lighthouse.

At this parting of ways, we pray that our tears may become a bridge of vernal flowers leading to the next life.

Basileios, prepare a neighborhood for us up there!

We wish you a good journey!

With pain and sorrow,
Ioannes Kambisopoulos

