



The Ethos of the Church

We must “empty ourselves” for God to enter into us

On Self-Love, Egocentrism, and Freedom

The following is an extract from a transcription of a homily by Archimandrite Georgios, Abbot of the Holy Monastery of St. Gregory (Mount Athos), delivered at the Faculty of Theology at the University of Athens after the service of Great Compline during Great Lent, 1988. Translated from the Greek.

A constant struggle is needed. And after all, does not the entirety of life in the Church help us in this regard?

The Holy Mysteries, prayers, Divine Liturgies, the prayer “Lord Jesus Christ” that we say on the Holy Mountain—and you surely say it here too—do these not comprise a constant effort to free ourselves from our **egocentric and selfish self-absorption**, and to **open ourselves up** to God and to our brothers?

The more **self-love** diminishes in us, the more **freedom** we feel and the more we unite with Christ. Christians who undertake such a struggle know by experience that the more they **open themselves up** to God, the more **God enters within them**. This is because God respects our freedom. As long we remain **full of ourselves** and our **self-love**, how can God enter? There is no room for Him to enter. **We have to empty ourselves for God to enter.**

And by our struggle to empty ourselves of our own will and mindset—as St. Peter of Damascus says—of our **self-**



conceit, our self-complacency, our self-assurance, and our self-trust, and by giving ourselves entirely over to God, God enters into us.

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A nun confessed to me that her Gerontissa, to whom she was eagerly and unquestioningly obedient, once said to her: "My child, you please me by your obedience."

The moment her Gerontissa told her that, she felt that **God entirely entered into her.**

She experienced that. You see?

She had entirely **emptied** herself of all her personal will, and **God entirely entered into her.**

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The same thing happened to a peasant worker from a village near the Holy Mountain, who worked at our monastery as a woodcutter.



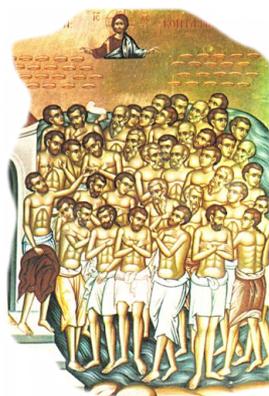
One day, as he was walking through our forest, he greeted me and said:

"Sit down, Elder, and I will tell you a great miracle worked for me by the Holy Forty Martyrs, so that you can see how wonderworking they are.

"My leg hurt for years. I would go to doctors and hospitals, but they couldn't do anything for me.

"Since I love the Holy Forty Martyrs very much, I went to the parish in my village on their Feast Day. The Church was full of people.

"As soon as I arrived, my leg began to ache terribly. I thought of going outside the Church to rest it a while. But then I had the thought: 'Judas left the Mystical Supper and went out. Will you also become a Judas? You will stay inside even if you hurt.' Soon, I began to hurt even more and I thought of sitting down to rest my leg. At that moment, however, I looked at the Icon of the Holy Forty Martyrs, saw them freezing in the lake, and said to myself: 'They were so patient and



froze for Christ's sake, and you can't even stand up? You will remain standing even if it kills you.'

"The moment I said that, a current came and wrapped around my head, and passed through my body down to my aching leg. I have been well since then and never hurt again. You see, Elder, how wonderworking the Holy Forty Martyrs are?"

This person did not feel that he had done anything praiseworthy. He believed it was wholly a miracle of the Holy Forty Martyrs. But we see, when did the miracle take place and when did God enter him? When he emptied himself entirely of his self-love and was resolved even to die out of love for God....

