



**Irene Demetra Pateras**  
In the Angelic Schema Renamed  
**Irene Myrtidiotissa, Nun,**  
**Whom the Holy Church Commemorates November 13.**

*Dismissal Hymn of Blessed Irene. First Tone*

**W**ITH one accord let us the faithful praise wise Irene Myrtidiotissa, the glory and scion of Oinousses and Chios, and the manifest boast of the monastics and righteous; and with one voice let us cry in hymns and spiritual songs: Glory to Christ Who hath glorified thee. Glory to Him that hath made thee incorrupt, Glory to Him Who in these last days hast shown thee forth as His righteous handmaiden.

*Kontakion of Blessed Irene. Fourth Tone*

**B**Y LIVING righteously in the rule of courageous endurance, thou didst prove to be a true staff of all the faithful, O all-lauded Irene. Thou didst gladden the choirs of the monastics, and thou dost shelter thy convent with the presence of thine incorrupt relics; and thou intercedest with Christ for them that honour thee.

*Megalynarion of Blessed Irene*

**W**E THE Poor and humble do call thee blest, \* O Irene, our mother, \* and we honour thee as is due; \* for thy life was pleasing \* to God and to His Angels; \* for this, we magnify thee with the angelic hosts.



Irene was the third child of the Pateras family, born March 17/30, 1929 on the feast of Saint Alexis the Man of God. Her name, Irene, (meaning peace in Greek) describes her character, for from her childhood years she was distinguished not only by her quietness, meekness and seriousness, but also by her courage and spirit of sacrifice. It was enough for one to see her to become peaceful, no matter what troubled him.

An incident from the time when she was seven years old shows her as a young confessor. The family settled in Alexandria, Egypt in 1946. Irene and her sister were in a Roman Catholic school, while their brother studied at the Patriarchal School of Alexandria. The parent had demanded of the authorities at the Roman Catholic school that their daughters not be given the religious instruction of the Roman Catholics, but rather that, during that hour, they would have a lesson in the Greek language. They had also told their elder daughter Calliope to watch that the Catholics not try to draw Irene into private conversations and instructions. Irene herself, however, displayed even greater discretion. One day when she was alone, they took her to a Roman Catholic church to give her communion. When the priest offered her the wafer and, refusing, she drew back, he said, "But why don't you communicate, Irene, since we're just the same?" To this she replied: "Since we're the same, you come first to Saint Savva (the Orthodox Cathedral in Alexandria) and communicate then I'll receive communion from you." When Christopher, the Patriarch of Alexandria, later heard of this dialogue, he

exclaimed: "How enlightened that little child is! Not even a theologian could have said the same with such readiness and boldness."

### *The Beginning of Her Illness*

When Irene's father fell ill, her child's heart could not bear to see her father's suffering. With all the warmth of her innocent soul, she secretly prayed to our Christ that she would receive the fatal illness and that her father would become well. Not even two weeks passed when she came down with a high fever. It was the school year 1955-1956 and Irene was studying at the Arsakion School of Athens. One day, she asked her mother: "Mama, maybe I have my father's illness?" Her mother was somewhat shaken and answered severely, "What kind of talk is that, my child?" "All right, Mama, I just said it."

Everyone thought that it was just a short illness, because Irene had never had a serious health problem. But as the days passed and the fever did not abate, her parents took her to the Red Cross Hospital. There the ever-memorable Panagiotis Poulitsas, the principal of Arsakion, visited her. When Mrs. Pateras thanked him for the honour, he replied: "Did I honour Irene or did Irene honour the Arsakion?" Such was the impression that her virtue had made on the people around her.

For forty days therapy was given for rheumatism as the result of an incorrect diagnosis. In the meantime Irene's condition deteriorated; she lost twenty-two pounds. Finally another doctor made a biopsy from fluid taken from a gland in her neck and the correct diagnosis was made: she had her father's illness. Her mother was told and was advised to seek treatment in Switzerland.

In Zurich they joined her father who was there for treatment also. Dr. Rohr confirmed the diagnosis, but added with astonishment: "In 10,000 instances I have not seen a case of Hodgkin's disease in two members of the same family!"

While in the clinic, Irene once again asked her mother if she had her father's illness. But her mother replied: No, you don't. You have a serious illness, but our Panagia gave you the gift of patience and you will be able to endure."

### *The Revelation of Her Illness*

In 1958 they were preparing to go to London. They asked their physician in Switzerland to write out the diagnosis for both Mr. Pateras and Irene. They wanted to visit another blood specialist so that Irene would not understand that she had the same disease as her father. Dr. Rohr willingly wrote the diagnoses.

They visited the physician in London, who saw her father first. But by mistake, Irene had been given her own diagnosis. She read it. After the examination she was very sad. When her mother saw her that way, she asked her: "What's the matter, Irene? Why are you sad?"

"It's nothing, Mama," she answered, "I'm only human. It will pass."

When they returned to Switzerland, on one occasion, when she was talking to her sister, she disclosed everything.

"God gave me our father's illness. I asked for it in a prayer from the depth of my heart. I asked for his illness so that his pains would be mitigated, and because he is more needed for the family. God gave it to me immediately, in about fifteen days. I did not expect an answer so quickly. I asked mother about it twice, but she didn't tell me. She should have told me, so that I could orient the direction of my life. You didn't do well at all. You should have told me from the beginning."

But she didn't complain to her mother. Afterwards, when everything was out in the open, they discussed her illness and even her death, as though she were preparing for her wedding trip; how her burial clothes would be, what they would write on her grave, etc.

Her father loved her beyond measure. When he learned of her sacrifice, he looked upon her as a victim that was being sacrificed for his sake. For all the years that Irene was sick, her father's pains and radiation treatments ceased.

With the grace of God, they comprehended the deeper meaning of this trial and rejoiced that the illness was given "for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified through it" (John 11:4). Irene especially rejoiced and thanked God because He "heard her supplication" and had deemed her worthy to suffer for the sake of His commandment.

### *Spiritual Orientation*

All the years of her illness, she drew strength from the Holy Mysteries of our Church: confession, Holy Unction, and frequent Holy Communion. Wherever she was, whether in the clinic or at home, she unfailingly read the daily services—Vespers, Compline, the Supplicatory Canon to the Mother of God—and also studied the lives of the Saints and patristic books.

On her face was registered a singular cheerfulness and serenity. In all ways she tried to bring peace. If any of the maids would cause some damage, she would say that she did it, and would comfort them if her mother reprimanded them.

She had great discretion which enabled her to settle differences peacefully. Her life was full of incidents which revealed her spirit of sacrifice, humble-mindedness and sincere love towards all. One could read in her eyes the words love and sacrifice. In spite of this, she felt otherwise about herself and would say to her mother and spiritual Fathers: “I have a stone in my heart. Pray that the stone will soften so that I might acquire love.”

She was distinguished by her seriousness of character, straightforwardness and integrity, but she always unfolded these traits tactfully and politely. She was not easily influenced by other people, but calmly and persistently kept to her principles, without creating turmoil or confusion.

She avoided as much as possible tiring others because of her condition. Her bed of pain became a cool fount that refreshed all those about her and even those far away, because with her prayers and letters she helped many friends and relatives from afar.

She never judged anyone, but would say: “If they knew what I have been taught by spiritual Fathers, they would have become saints.”

Irene was given to self-reproach. She would say to her mother: “Mama, what will I hear from our Christ...do you know what He’ll say as soon as I see Him? ‘You received your good things on earth!’”

“Why will He say that to you my Irene?”

“Mama, as soon as I get sick, immediately we get on an airplane and go to Switzerland. ‘This way Miss Pateras; here you are, Miss Pateras.’ Clean sheets, a good bed, the best medicine, the most advanced therapy. Mama, don’t you remember when we visited the hospitals in Greece and saw patients in beds lined up in the corridor

calling out, 'Nurse, nurse!' and nobody would pay attention to them? Weren't they people? What answer will I give?" Such thoughts as these continually tortured her conscience and humbled her soul.

In the summer of 1960 she spent forty days at the Holy Convent of Saint Menas on Aegina. Here she had many opportunities to visit the Elder Ieronymos at his hermitage and hear his spiritual counsel. He urged her to read the *Ascetical Homilies of St. Isaac the Syrian*. When she had finished the volume, she went again to the Elder who asked her: "What did you understand from what you read? Did you understand anything?"

"No Elder," answered Irene.

"Go, then, and read the book once more, then come again." And in fact, Irene re-read the whole book, and the next time she went to the Elder, she had notes with her.

During her stay in the convent, a relative who stayed with her a few days witnessed the following: one night, she chanced to get up. Passing by Irene's room, she saw a strong but sweet light, even there was no electricity there. She opened the door to see if Irene perhaps had pain or fever, but she was sleeping peacefully. The next day she asked if anything was wrong that night and if she had lit the lamp, but she replied that nothing at all had happened, neither had she lit the lamp.

She lived her martyrdom silently and our Christ enlightened and cleansed her pure heart so that daily her inner beauty was reflected on her face more clearly.

When she returned to stay at St. Menas, she moved into the basement of their home, into a small apartment that had been remodeled to resemble a monastic cell. She stayed there with the spiritual assistance of the Eldress Matrona of Chios, the latter performing her monastic obediences, the former persevering with patience in her pains.

One day, she took the nun Matrona with her up to her former room. She opened the wardrobe and told her, without her parents knowing, to take all her worldly clothes, handbag, furs, shoes, and other objects and to dispose of them wherever and however she wished. Irene was already wearing a dress of a cheap grey cotton material that cost six drachmas a yard, and she remarked, "That's sufficient. More than that is superfluity, extravagance and conceit." After a little while she wore only black.

In this spiritual environment, day by day the sweet fruit of the desire for monastic life began to mature. But because she was not able to fulfill the cell rule, and because she saw herself as unworthy of this high calling, she was hesitant and delayed her decision. Father Panteleimon told her that patience in her illness replaces prostrations

and asceticism. Other hesitations were resolved through further spiritual counsel, so she came to a final decision on October 6/19, 1960. She also expressed the desire that the tonsure take place on October 26/ November 8, the Feast of Saint Demetrius, since she had a special love for her patron Saint. This desire caused no little anxiety among her relatives, since it was the doctor's opinion that her condition had worsened to the point where her life could be shortened to a matter of hours. But Irene had deep faith and was sure that she would live until then.

### *Her Tonsure*

On the evening of the twenty-fifth of October, a vigil service took place in the small chapel of the Pateras' home, in which Father Philotheos Zervakos, and Father Panteleimon (a deacon then) took part, the latter as sponsor for her monastic tonsure. Present also were Irene's parents and other close relatives, the nun Matrona and a few others.

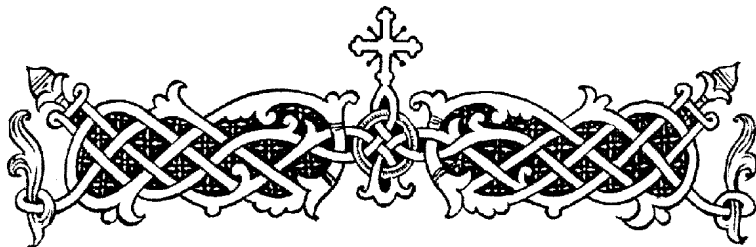
Father Philotheos advised Irene not to get up for the service, since she was in bed with severe pains and a continuous, painful cough. When they reached the point in the service where the tonsure should take place, they would come down to the cell in the basement and there read the prayers for the tonsure. Irene was silent, but when the vigil had begun, she got ready quietly and without anyone taking note, went up in the small elevator and sat in a room to hear the service. When they began the service for the Angelic Schema, she came into the chapel and began to make full prostrations before all the icons of the icon-screen and before her parents and the others present. She was exhausted in the extreme, and it was only with great difficulty that she gave the appropriate answers to the questions asked by Father Philotheos in the service for the Great Schema. At this time, though, the cough little by little began to subside, and when she was finally dressed as a nun, it stopped completely.

By the end of the Liturgy, the nun Irene Myrtdiotissa felt completely well and remained so for almost a month. A few days after the tonsure a blood test proved that physiologically she was in fact quite well, to the amazement of both doctors and relatives. This was the grace of the Schema, a witness to God's presence.

During this period, Mother Irene did all her work and all her monastic obediences. She didn't leave her cell now, except for great necessity. When her parents invited her upstairs to see them, she politely refused, saying: "I'm a nun; it's not allowed."

### *The Repose of Mother Irene*

While all could hardly believe the great change in her health, suddenly, on November 8/21, 1960, severe pains began, more severe than at any other time. She was taken to the hospital where she suffered terribly. Close relatives and spiritual acquaintances remained with her continuously, as daily it became more evident that her departure was drawing near. On Saturday, November 13/26, at about 4-4:30 a.m. her mother notified the others in the house to come quickly to the hospital. Father Philotheos, her father, and other relatives and friends came and waited in complete silence in Mother Irene's room. She was quiet; the others around her gazed at her prayerfully. At 6:40, as the sun had barely risen above the hill, she gave up her soul peacefully to her Heavenly Bridegroom, having been purified by the fire of pain and the water of a second baptism, the Angelic Schema. Only then did her close friend, Mrs. Angeliki Panagopoulos, who had stayed with her on previous days, remember what Mother Irene had told her on Friday: "If you want to see your neighbour again, come tomorrow very early, before the sun rises."



The body was brought to the Pateras' home immediately, where it was prepared for burial according to the monastic custom. A deep serenity reigned; the face of Mother Irene radiated a soft light. Instead of lamentations, her mother expressed thanksgiving and praise to God. She felt an inexplicable peace and hitherto unknown joy. And her father, as he gazed at his daughter after she was prepared for burial, said softly, "You closed your eyes, my child, now my pains will begin again."

At the suggestion of Father Philotheos, the funeral was held on the same day, at 5:00 in the afternoon, at the Holy Convent of Saint John the Theologian, in Holargos, a suburb of Athens. Because of the grief of all those present was transformed into Paschal joy, and Father Theocletos of the Holy Mountain exclaimed, "What should we chant

now—a funeral service or a Resurrection service?” She was buried in the cemetery adjacent to the Convent directly in the earth with a stone under her head, as is the monastic custom, without a coffin.

### *The Exhumation of Mother Irene*

On the evening of the twenty-third of September (o. s.) 1963, the eve of the Feast of the Mother of God “Myrtidiotissa,” a vigil service was held in the little chapel in the Pateras’ home in Psychiko. Father Panteleimon and his Synodia, together with Father Demetrios Papantonis and Father Theocletos were present. At the conclusion of the Liturgy, early in the morning, they set out for the cemetery together with her mother and a few others to exhume the relics of the nun Irene (as is the custom in Greece), taking with them a wooden chest which was intended to be a receptacle for the bones. But as the digging proceeded what was encountered was not bones, but the whole and intact relics of the blessed nun. Even the carved wooden cross of her tonsure was still underneath her right hand. Only the right hand had been struck at the wrist, in spite of all the care taken during the excavation.

With wonder and inexplicable joy they carried the relics to the Convent in a sheet, where the nuns chanted joyful hymns of the Resurrection. From the Convent church they were transferred to Mother Irene’s own cell in Psychiko. Two nuns came from the above-mentioned convent, who cleaned the relics and dressed her in a rasso. In the meantime the whole house was pervaded by a sweet scent.

Later, the question arose as to where the relics should be placed. Father Philotheos went to Archbishop Chrysostom II of Athens to relate the whole history. He was ordered to transfer the relics to the Convent of Oinoussai. In addition, written permission was given by the Locum Tenens of Chios, Iakovos of Mytilene, to place the reliquary in one of the chapels of the Convent.

### *The Controversy Over the Holy Relics*

After five years, the then Bishop of Chios, Chrysostom Gialouris, accused the Convent of illegally having an “unburied body” in public view which threatened the public health. The County Physician was sent to examine the relics, which he did in the presence of a doctor who was an acquaintance of the family. He wrote in his report that

no offensive order comes from the relics. He concluded that “they had been embalmed by an imperceptible and unknown method, and that they should not come into contact with people.”

How did they embalm the body, however, since the nun died on Saturday morning and was buried in the afternoon of the same day? And how was there not any incision in the abdomen or other part of the body?

The Swiss doctor Bessler, who was acquainted with the family and was continuously near the relics until the burial, as well as Father Philotheos Zervakos testified that no embalming took place. The body was buried, and after three years was found incorrupt (as are the holy relics of Saint Eudokimos, Saint Spyridon, Saint Dionysius, Saint Gerasimus, and many others) and exhuding a pleasant odor, as the three Fathers who were present at the exhumation can testify, together with many relatives, friends, and all the nuns of the Holy Convent of Saint John the Theologian.

In spite of these witnesses the controversy continued and in February of 1969 Bishop Chrysostom issued an edict declaring the decision of the Locum Tenens Bishop Iakovos to be void, and demanded that “the unburied body of the dead nun be buried immediately.” After several court trials, the case was finally settled by a decision of the Supreme Court of Greece on November 13, 1971, declaring the nun Maria Myrtdiotissa innocent.

Today the reliquary is located in the memorial sepulcher next to the main church, which also houses the graves of Father Xenophon and Mother Maria and their other beloved daughter, Callioipi and son Diamantis. On the marble enclosure of Mother Irene’s reliquary the following has been engraved:

*THE SOULS OF THE RIGHTEOUS ARE IN THE HANDS OF GOD,  
AND NO TORMENT SHALL TOUCH THEM.  
IN THE SIGHT OF THE UNWISE THEY SEEMED TO DIE  
AND THEIR DEPARTURE IS TAKEN FOR MISERY,  
AND THEIR GOING FORTH FROM US TO BE UTTER  
DESTRUCTION  
BUT THEY ARE IN PEACE.*

Wisdom of Solomon 3:1-3