

BLESSED WATER

— Some General Information — Part Two

From the Life of Saint Theodore of Sykeon (+613), we learn the following:

The community of the village of Apoukoumis slaughtered an ox and were eating its flesh. But it happened that all those who partook of it fell down like dead men and the meat that was left over turned black and gave forth a horrible stench. Some of the villagers who had not eaten of the meat went to the Saint to report the disaster which had occurred in their village.

And he told them that the meat had been rendered so harmful by a host of demons that had passed through the pot, and as he could not go with them himself because of the visit of a high official, he blessed some water and sent it by one of the brothers for sprinkling the sick and giving it to them to drink. When this was done, they all arose as if from sleep and only one died. For the headman John had not waited for the Saint's prayer to help his brother, but ran to a woman who used enchantments and, taking an amulet from her, hung it onto his brother, who immediately died.

In more recent times, we learn the following from the Life of Saint Seraphim of Domvu (+1602), who lived when Greece and the Balkans were occupied by the Moslem Ottoman Turks:

Once, when the Saint was still living, an endless swarm of ravaging locusts attacked the fields around Athens. The danger threatened not only the fields, but also the orchards. The Athenians remembered Saint Seraphim and sent for him so that he might drive away this peril.

When Saint Seraphim arrived, he went to the Sacred Monastery of Saint Spyridon in Piraeus, where, after a procession, he chanted the Service of the Blessing of Holy Water. When he intoned the words, "Save, O Lord, Thy people..." and cast the cross into the sea — O wonder! —

that cloud of locusts gathered together, fell into the sea and drowned. Many people —not only Christians, but even Moslems who were there — took water from the sea into which the precious cross had been immersed, and many who drank of it were healed of long-standing sicknesses. Seeing this marvel, and partaking of that holy water, which had been turned from sea water into fresh, the Athenians gave the Saint a cross of great price, together with a considerable amount of money so that he might use it for the finishing and adorning of the monastery church.

Later on in the Saint's Life, we read the following:

The miracles of the Saint did not cease after his ascent into the Heavens. He continued to guard his monastery, never permitting tyrants to violate and destroy it, though many had this intention and even issued orders for this purpose.

The people of Athens have never forgotten the miracle the Saint had worked for them. They built a church named in honor of Saint Seraphim at upper Phaleron, where they celebrate his feastday with much festivity. This is especially true of the farming people of the area surrounding Athens. In their every need, they turn to the Saint, seeking his ready assistance, bringing the Saint's holy relics and skull from his monastery, though it lies such a great distance away.

Because of the miracle of the locusts, which Saint Seraphim wrought, people from many regions ask that his holy relics be brought when the locusts appear and cause great harm to their crops. The Service of Holy Water is chanted, and truly, by the fervent faith of the Christians on the one hand, and the Saint's mediation with God on the other, the plague vanishes. For according to the Saviour's divine words, faith which is free of doubt can do all things: "If ye have faith, and doubt not...if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done" (Matt. 21:21). And it was not only the pious Christians who were

counted worthy of the Saint's wonderworking power; indeed, even the Hagarenes themselves, who ruled over Greece at that time, were counted worthy of the same grace. For many, witnessing the power of the Service of Holy Water, which was served and blessed with the Saint's holy relics, asked for and received some of this holy water from the Christians. When they sprinkled their fields, which were threatened by locusts, they too were delivered from this scourge by the wonderworking power of Saint Seraphim.

In Amarousion¹, some elders of advanced age tell of the following event which took place in their day. A certain Turk had a very large orchard of fruit trees. One spring, an enormous cloud of locusts descended upon this grove and threatened to destroy not only the tender leaves, but even the branches and the tree trunks.

Now this Turk had heard how the Christians, when faced with similar circumstances, called upon God's help through their priests. Therefore, he too invited one of the ministers of his religion, the *imam*, to beg Mohammed to help him. But even though the *imam* besought the help of him whom they esteem to be a great prophet, and though he cried out loudly from morning until night, yet this devotee of the antichrist Mohammed suffered the same fate as the priests of shame in the time of the Prophet Elias. There was, as the Scripture says, "neither voice, nor hearing" (III Kingdoms 18:26 LXX). Nothing happened.

While the Turk was in total despair as he watched his orchard being destroyed, a certain Christian promised the Turk that he would bring a Christian priest, who by his prayer would drive away the locusts.

It so happened that during those days, a priest from Saint Seraphim's monastery had been invited to Amarousion for this very purpose, which is why he had the Saint's grace-flowing skull with him. The above-

¹ Now a district within the city limits of modern Athens.

mentioned Christian found this priest-monk and led him to the Turk's orchard. As soon as the priest-monk completed the Service of Holy Water, the vast cloud of locusts arose and vanished.

On seeing this marvel, the Turk thanked the priest-monk profusely, and then went and beat the *imam* mercilessly. From that time on, he never ceased proclaiming his gratitude to Saint Seraphim.²

(To be continued)

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