

THE MONKS' FAVORITE

by
Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

*If Thou shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, O Lord,
who shall stand? For with Thee there is forgiveness.*
Psalm 129:3

In 1963, the year I was tonsured as a rassophor monk, we visited the Holy Mountain, Athos. From Thessalonica, we travelled by bus to the town of Uranoupolis, near the border of the Athonite peninsula. From there, we took a small motor-driven launch, locally known as an *atmákaton*, and sailed along the Athonite coast, stopping to visit some monasteries along the way. I was enthralled by the crystal-clear waters of the Aegean. One could gaze in wonder right down through the water to the sea floor, and see all the little fishies scurrying to get away from our boat as it plied the pristine waters over their heads.

An old monk was sitting at the prow of the ship and so the founder of our monastery in Boston, Father Panteleimon, asked him, "What monastery are you from, father?"

The monk replied, "The Monastery of Xenophon."

"Do you have a good abbot there?" Father Panteleimon asked again.

"Some monks love him, some can't stand to look at him," replied the old monk dryly.

At that point, a monk sitting next to Father Panteleimon in the boat nudged him in the side and whispered into his ear, "Father Panteleimon, the old monk that's talking to you *is* the abbot!"

"Oh!" said Father Panteleimon, surprised.

We all had a good chuckle over that one.

After a few moments, Father Panteleimon asked the old abbot again, "How many monks do you have in your monastery, reverend father?"

"For church, for work, or for mealtimes?" asked the abbot in turn.

Stifled laughter everywhere

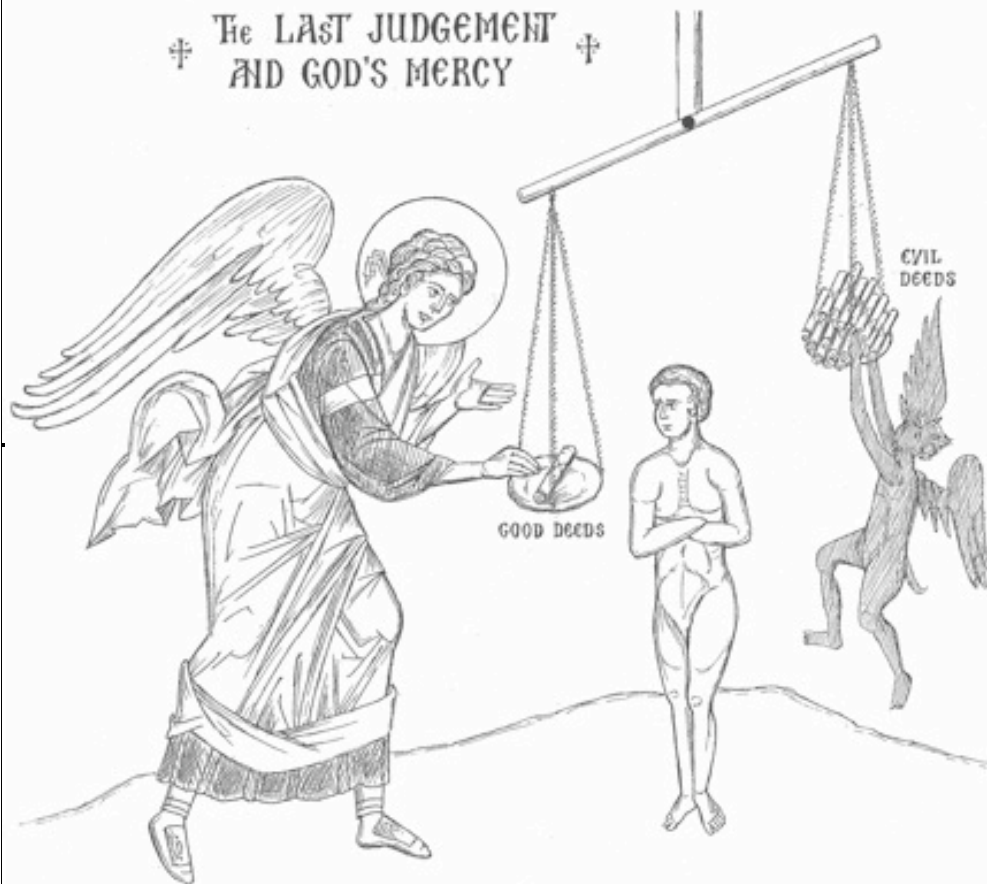
Well, anyway, to make a long story short, we finally arrived at the Monastery of Dionysiou. There, we were introduced to the famous and venerable abbot of the monastery, Father Gabriel, and we visited in his quarters for a time.

Afterward, we were given a tour of the monastery by one of the fathers. At one point in the tour we came to an area where the walls were covered with ancient frescoes. As we were examining the frescoes, we came to one that caught everyone's attention. It depicted a soul being judged at the Last Judgement. The soul looked very worried, because the balance that was to weigh the soul's deeds had a super-abundance of scrolls of evil deeds piled up on one side. On the side where the good deeds were, there was only one small scroll! However, the soul's guardian angel was *tilting the balance so that the few good deeds out-weighed the many evil deeds!*

God's mercy to the rescue!

On the next page is a sketch of that particular fresco, which was, obviously, very beloved and popular among the monks.

† THE LAST JUDGEMENT †
AND GOD'S MERCY



+ Based on frescoes at the monasteries in Meteora, the Holy Mountain and Serbia.

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