

Life after life: Get ready for the trip of a lifetime

By **FATHER THEODORE PETRIDES**

November 07, 2009 12:00 AM

"I await the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come." Amen.

On a recent plane ride returning from a pilgrimage to the Holy Mountain, a kingdom of monasteries in northern Greece, I sat next to a very nice person with whom I had an interesting conversation. She had been on a pilgrimage herself, as a Jew, to the Holy Land.

We spoke about the crisis in the Middle East. She related to me her enthusiasm in seeing so many historic holy sites; Jewish, Christian, and Muslim. She called it a trip of a lifetime. I described my experiences with the monks to her as a foretaste of eternity.

As we began to discuss similarities and differences in beliefs the topic of conversation turned to the afterlife. I was surprised to find that she did not have a belief in the afterlife. For her, people only "live on" in the hearts of their loved ones in this life. That's all.

I was perplexed. How could someone not believe that their soul lives on beyond this life? Belief in not just a life after this one, but, in a bodily resurrection of all the dead, is fundamental to the Christian faith. The last article of the creed confessed by all Orthodox Christians states emphatically, "I believe in the resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come."

I explained to my new friend on the plane that the perspective of the Orthodox Christian Church is quite different. Using the book that I was holding as a prop, I related that many people refer to life as a book. While most tend to think that death is the last chapter of the book "of their lives," the church sees it quite differently. For us, when we die it is not like turning the page and reading, Epilogue, but turning the page and seeing the heading, Chapter One. This life is just the introduction. That's all. It is just a blink of the eye when compared to eternity.

I would like to share the story of a simple obscure person who was also on a pilgrimage through this life and whose departure from it illustrates the belief of Christians in both the afterlife and in He, who because of His Resurrection from the dead, has given us all hope in a life to come, "where there is neither pain, nor sorrow, nor suffering, but life everlasting."

In 1922, an orphaned Greek child named Simeon came from Asia Minor with the more than one million refugees forced to leave their homeland. He settled in Peiraia, a port of Athens, in a little hut and there grew up on his own. He had a little cart and was a porter, transporting things to the port of Peiraia. He had a blessed simplicity and a simple and uncurious faith.

When he came of age, he got married, had two children and moved with his family to Nicaea. Every morning he would go to the port of Peiraia to work. However, every day in the morning as he would pass by the Church of St. Spyridon, he would enter in, stand before the icon screen, take off his little hat and say: "Good morning, my Christ, I'm Simeon. Help me to make my ends meet."

At night when he finished his work he would again pass by the church, go again before the icons and say: "I thank you for helping me again today." And thus the years of the blessed Simeon passed by.

Around the year 1950, all the members of his family became ill with tuberculosis and reposed in the Lord. Simeon remained all alone and continued his job without murmuring. He also did not omit passing by St. Spyridon to say good morning and good evening to Christ, asking His help and thanking Him.

When Simeon became old, he fell ill. He was hospitalized for about one month. A presiding nurse from Patras asked him once: "Grandfather, you have been here for so many days and no one has come to see you. Don't you have any relative of your own in the world?"

He answered, "Every morning and afternoon my child, Christ comes and consoles me."

"And what does he tell you, Grandfather?"

"Good morning, Simeon, I'm Christ, be patient."

"Good afternoon, Simeon, I'm Christ, be patient."

The presiding nurse found it strange and called her spiritual father, Father Christodoulos Fasos, to come see Simeon in case he was deluded. Father Christodoulos visited him, struck up a conversation with him, asked him the nurse's question and Simeon gave him the same answer.

At the same times in the morning and at night, when Simeon would go to the church and greet Christ, now Christ also greeted Simeon. The Spiritual Father asked him: "Maybe you're imagining things?"

"No, Father, I am not imagining, it is Christ."

"Did He come today, also?"

"He came."

"And what did He tell you?"

"Good morning Simeon, I'm Christ. Be patient, in three days I will take you near me early in the morning."

The spiritual father went every day to the hospital to speak with him and learned about his life. He realized that he was a blessed man. On the third day early in the morning he again went to see Simeon and to ascertain if the prophecy that he would die would be fulfilled. Truly while they were speaking, Simeon shouted suddenly: "Christ has come" and he reposed the sleep of the just.

That is a trip of a lifetime. It is a taste of eternity. May we all pass through this life with Simeon's simple faith, awaiting the life of the age to come. Amen.

Holy Cross Greek Orthodox Church mission statement

The Orthodox Church is the church founded by Jesus Christ and described in the pages of the New Testament. Her history can be traced in an unbroken continuity all the way back to Christ and the apostles.

Steeped in holy tradition, she is the church that gave us the Holy Scriptures and has accurately and consistently interpreted them for her millions upon millions of faithful members through 20 centuries. She is the church that received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, that has been adorned and safeguarded for 2,000 years by the martyrs, ascetics and all the saints, continuing to offer new life in Christ, without adding or subtracting from the deposit of faith given with the Lord's advent upon the earth, until he comes again. This is what Orthodoxy literally means — true worship and correct faith.

There are about 300 million Orthodox Christians worldwide, mostly in the Middle-Eastern and Slavic countries, but less than six million in the United States.

The Orthodox continue to face persecution. More than eight million Orthodox Christians have been martyred for their faith in Christ in this past century alone, swelling the ranks of the church in heaven.

The Greek Orthodox Church of the Holy Cross in Stroudsburg is under the direct jurisdiction of the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople (modern-day Istanbul), being one of the 600-plus parishes of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America. Services are in both English and Greek. All are welcome.