

ARCHIMANDRITE AIMILIANOS
OF SIMONOPETRA

FOOLS FOR CHRIST

Prologue
ARCHIMANDRITE ELISAIOS

Translated, edited and annotated by
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Elder Aimilianos

The Elder, Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonos Petras (1934-2019), was born in Nikaia, Piraeus, Greece, to pious parents with roots in Asia Minor. He received his primary education from them and his grandparents, who were exemplary teachers of that period, but foremost, he inherited an indelible spiritual wealth.

After graduating from the Theological School of Athens, he ardently desired to serve God's people, thus, he dedicated himself faithfully to a monastic and priestly life. On 9 December 1960, he was tonsured a monk and subsequently ordained to the diaconate by the eminent Metropolitan of Trikkis and Stagon, Dionysios Haralambous. His ordination into the priesthood followed on 15 August 1961, whereupon he was installed as the Abbot of the Great Meteoron, the largest monastery of Meteora.

In 1973, he was invited with his brotherhood to repopulate the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras on Mount Athos, which had only a few elderly monks, and he was elected Abbot on 25 November 1973. He also had a sisterhood that followed him, which was established in 1974 at the Dependency of Simonopetra at Ormylia, Halkidiki, (an old dependency of the Athonite Monastery of

Vatopaidi.) This became the Holy Convent of the Annunciation of the Theotokos, of which he is the founder.

The Elder, as Abbot of Simonopetra, attended to the restoration of the building and its facilities and the formation and harmonious running of its internal life; but his main goal was to keep inspiring his brotherhood and Dependencies with the ethos of his hope-filled and revelatory words that he generously shared with his spiritual children and the thirsting souls in the world.

The fruit of this toilsome endeavor are the homilies and orations from his spiritual experiences that the Sisters of the Holy Convent of Ormylia have undertaken the task of compiling, editing, translating and publishing unto the benefit and solace of all.

On 9 May 2019, after a long illness, Elder Aimilianos passed away at the Holy Convent, where he was laid to rest. The epitaph on his tomb has the verse “O God, my God, to You I rise early at dawn” (Ps 62:1 LXX), which was the ceaseless expression of his whole life.

Prologue

You are holding in your hands the homily of our revered Elder Aimilianos titled *Fools for Christ*. The homily was given at the Church of the Holy Cross in Serres, Greece, on 18 December 1987, at the request of His Eminence, Maximos, the Metropolitan of Serres.

The import of this homily is timeless yet also timely. It is timeless because, recurrently, over the centuries, “Christians felt that they were on the brink of death, fools for the sake of Christ... they lived a life that the people of the world could not understand, and that is why the world considered them the offscouring, the scum of society.” Yet the homily is also timely because, during this so-called time of crisis, in the climate of confusion, insecurity, and disillusionment, its admonitions can resurrect our values, give us a sense of security and hope, generate enthusiasm in our soul “that does not advocate anything, other than our sacrificing everything just to be with God.”

At the same time, the content of the homily inspires a charismatic life, a life of repentance and also a life of communion—a participation in the life of God, in the same fashion as evidenced by the saintly “fools for Christ” of our Church. The homily generates a true vision of life, which is “to scorn this

temporary world and its vanity” and “to desire the city that is to come, the city that will remain forever.” After all, for the entirety of his life, Elder Aimilianos preached “Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God” (1Cor 1:23-24).

It is not easy, nor is it accepted, in this day and age for someone to live as a fool for Christ. However, “all of us are ‘fools for Christ’—to a greater or lesser degree—as the apostle Paul had said (cf 1Cor 4:10). Which Christian, living in the world, does not differ from those who do not believe?” Both the homily and the lifestyle of the saintly fools for Christ are a loud wake-up call to the lethargy of the day, an escape from worldly dignity and the passions, a readjustment of the arrangements that provide for a life of indolence, and a “push and shove,” or a hopeful *point de depart*, for the people living around us.

Reading the homily for the first time, the reader will probably want to read it again a second or third time. Maybe for others it will be a source of delight, a booklet of daily comfort, or a dear companion as one braves the waves, the abuses, and the false dreams of life. We wish this to be true from the depths of our soul.

The Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Simonos Petras
Archimandrite Elisaios

About the Translation

For all of the passages that were quoted from Scripture by the Elder, the English translation that we have used is *The Orthodox Study Bible*, Thomas Nelson, Inc. (Nashville, 2008).

We would like to thank Scott Cairns, the Professor of English and the Director of the Low Residency MFA Program at Seattle Pacific University, and Nina Rutherford Christou, for reading through the final draft of this translation and for sharing with us their comments and suggestions.

FOOLS FOR CHRIST

Today, we celebrated the feastday of the holy hieromartyr Modestos [18 Dec.],¹ whose life's desire was to die for the sake of Christ. When that longed-for-hour arrived, he lunged into martyrdom with all the might of his soul.

With the chanting of Vespers this evening, we have begun to celebrate the feast of another saint, whose name is Boniface [19 Dec.].² His story is quite peculiar, and could very well scandalize us. Yet, the Church knows why She placed him at the threshold of the feast of Christ's Birth.

Boniface lived in Rome. He worked as a steward and secretary for a noblewoman. She was the daughter of a Roman proconsul and her name was Aglaïs. Boniface managed her estate, but there was also another affair going on between them that was problematic, yet quite human. Though she was pious and she believed in Christ, she was also a passionate woman who could not control her desires. Boniface, being a compassionate man, merciful and pious, found himself entangled in a relationship of sinning daily. They were living an emotional confusion: on

1. Makarios, Hieromonk of Simonos Petras, *The Synaxarion*, Holy Convent of the Annunciation of Our Lady (Ormylia, 1999), ii. 463-4.

2. Op. cit. 483-5.

the one hand, their passion for each other, and on the other hand, their desire to have Christ enter into their hearts.

One day, Aglaïs said to Boniface: “You know that we are living in sin, and yet we still believe in God. I was thinking of sending you to the East, so that you can bring back relics of saintly martyrs, which will strengthen us in our struggles against our sin. In the East, hundreds, sometimes thousands, are being martyred daily. They are not afraid of anything. It is their belief that they do not die, that they do not suffer death, but that they are transported to heaven.” Boniface smiled at her and said, “If my relics were brought back to you, would you venerate them as sacred and holy?” Aglaïs was shocked at his response and said to him: “Stop that! This is no time for joking. We are sinners, so our bodies are not worthy of becoming holy relics.”

Aglaïs gave him a purse full of coins, twelve cavalymen as attendants, perfumes and myrrh for the sacred relics, and they set out for the East. When they arrived in Tarsus, Boniface instructed the cavalymen to remain at the inn and to rest, and he would return in a short while. The men thought that he was going to visit the tavern, because he enjoyed drinking wine, but Boniface did something else. He ran to the amphitheater to watch the struggles of the faithful, who desired to be sent off to the heavenly Father’s embrace through their

martyrdom. Watching the martyrs suffer, he encouraged them not to lose their crowns of martyrdom.

The executioners understood that Boniface was a Christian, so they advised him to leave, or else he would lose his life too. He refused, saying: "It is not my intention to exchange heaven for this life; on the contrary, I want to exchange this life for eternal life." The executioners tried to persuade him to avoid death, but he did not want to listen to them. So they hung him upside-down and flayed him to the bone, leaving him to hang for a while, hoping that he would change his mind. They said to him: "Are you crazy, or maybe foolish?" He replied, "I am quite sane!" They then poured lead into his mouth, which filled his entrails, and put him into a caldron filled with boiling tar. When he refused to change his mind, they finally beheaded him.

After a few days had passed, the cavalrymen found his body and recognized that it was Boniface. They never imagined that their master would do something like that. With tear-drenched eyes they brought his relic back to Rome, and presented it to the noblewoman, just as he had foretold. Aglaïs received it with amazement and emotion. She anointed it with aromatic oils and buried it. Soon afterwards, she built a church in his honor, and lived a chaste and pure life from then on. She died in peace and was acknowledged as a saint too, and she was buried next to the tomb

Other titles in English of
ARCHIMANDRITE AIMILIANOS'
PUBLISHED HOMILIES

1. The Authentic Seal, Ormylia 1999
2. The Way of the Spirit, Indiktos 2009
3. The Church at Prayer: The Mystical
Liturgy of the Heart, Indiktos 2015
4. Psalms and the Life of Faith, Indiktos 2015
5. On Prayer, Ormylia 2020
6. Our Daily Report to God, Ormylia 2021

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