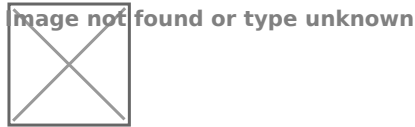


Patriarch Daniel: Saints Nazaria, Olympias, and Elizabeth of Văratec are models of prayer, diligence and charity



Patriarch Daniel of Romania has presented Saints Nazaria, Olympias and Elizabeth of Văratec as three distinct examples of holiness united by unceasing prayer, humble charity and diligent service to others. He delivered his message on the occasion of the local proclamation of their canonisation at Văratec Monastery.

Saints Nazaria, Olympias and Elizabeth of Văratec – models of hesychast prayer, diligence and charity

At Văratec Monastery, in a place blessed by Saint Paisius (Velichkovsky) of Neamț as a dwelling place of prayer for souls thirsting for God, a monastic community took shape over the centuries, which gave the Church three outstanding examples of spiritual life: Saint Nazaria, the first abbess of Văratec; Saint Olympias, the foundress of Văratec Monastery; and Saint Elizabeth Brâncoveanu, a noblewoman who dedicated the final years of her life to prayer and spiritual asceticism.

Though different in origin, these three saints meet on a single spiritual foundation: unceasing prayer carried in the mystery of the heart, charity practised with humility and discretion, and diligence and merciful love poured out upon those in need.

1. Hesychast women of prayer

Unceasing prayer was the spiritual nourishment of Saints Nazaria, Olympias and Elizabeth. They attained perfection in monastic asceticism, reaching purity of heart and the vision of divine light, as our Lord Jesus Christ teaches in the words: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matthew 5:8).

Saint Nazaria practised asceticism according to the hesychast tradition, following the teachings of Saint Basil of Poiana Mărului on unceasing prayer. She was constantly concerned with spiritual life, read and copied the writings of the great hesychasts, frequently prayed the Psalms, knew many passages of Holy Scripture by heart, and, through the power of her prayers, brought comfort and healing to

the sick.

Through her exemplary life, Saint Nazaria became a spiritual guide and mentor to the nuns, carrying forward the teachings she received from the hesychast spiritual fathers who guided her: Saints Basil of Poiana Mărului, Paisius of Neamț, and Joseph of Văratec.

Saint Olympias likewise had the same thirst for prayer, even though her life, more than that of the other two saints, was occupied with the administrative responsibilities of an increasingly large community. She never missed the church services, being the first in obedience and the first in church. She strictly observed her rule of prayer in her cell and spent the night reading Holy Scripture and copying patristic texts.

Under the guidance of Saints Paisius of Neamț and Joseph of Văratec, she practised the Jesus Prayer, which she recited unceasingly, even while carrying out household duties. This inner prayer strengthened her in the face of hardships.

Saint Elizabeth Brâncoveanu, although she entered the monastery in old age after spending much of her life in the world, was no less zealous in prayer. Having withdrawn to Văratec, she strictly observed the rule of prayer in her cell and attended church whenever her health permitted. When the infirmities of old age prevented her from attending the services in church, she fulfilled her rule of prayer in her cell.

Her devotion is also evident in the relationships she maintained with the monasteries of Mount Athos, to which she sent gifts and asked the Athonite monks to commemorate her in prayer.

2. Charity practised with humility and discretion

Another virtue evident in the lives of these three Venerable Mothers was charity practised with humility, characterised by concealing their own good deeds and by silence.

Saint Nazaria first experienced, through God's providence, the sorrow of losing her husband and her two children. Later, having matured in monastic life, she accepted the office of abbess as an act of obedience, renouncing her own will and thereby demonstrating her merciful love for the other nuns, first in the community of Durău Monastery and later at Văratec.

Saint Paisius of Neamț encouraged her, urging her to understand that the work of

an abbess, however difficult it might seem, was more precious before God than the tranquillity she had lost, because it was a work of humble love towards the other nuns in the community.

The same self-denial and readiness to show mercy appear in the life of Saint Olympias. Although she founded Văratec Monastery, sought out the site, spent her own wealth building the wooden church, and cared for the entire settlement, she repeatedly refused the honour of becoming abbess, considering herself unworthy of such a ministry.

Only after repeated insistence did she accept the office of abbess, likewise as an act of obedience and a renunciation of her own will. The name Olympias, chosen for her at her monastic tonsure by Saint Paisius of Neamț, fully reflects the worthiness and spiritual heights she attained by cultivating the virtues of humility and service to those around her.

Saint Elizabeth Brâncoveanu remains known today primarily for her works of Christian philanthropy. During her marriage to her husband, Great Ban Grigore Brâncoveanu, and later on as a widow, she consistently cared for churches and monasteries, donating estates, precious objects, and substantial sums of money to holy places in Moldavia, Wallachia, Mount Athos, and the Patriarchate of Jerusalem.

The foremost of her charitable works, however, remains the establishment in Bucharest of a hospital for the poor, conceived to receive the sick regardless of ethnicity, faith or material circumstances. She endowed this institution with such care and prudence that its reputation endured for more than a century after her repose.

3. Diligence and merciful love were fruits of their spiritual life

The virtues of the three saints were crowned by their merciful love for their neighbours.

Saint Nazaria showed her love for the community like a true mother, making no distinction between the nuns. The sisters often came to her cell to tell her about their problems, and she comforted them in their suffering, strengthened them and gently corrected them, always speaking the truth, however difficult it might be to receive.

Her concern for helping others was not limited to their spiritual lives but also encompassed their material needs. She appealed to the rulers of the time for tax exemptions and material assistance so that the increasingly numerous monastic

community would not lack food and clothing. Whenever a nun suffered from bodily illness, she bent her knees in prayer, bringing comfort and even healing to the sick sisters.

Saint Olympias likewise demonstrated her love for the nuns of the community through diligence and generosity. All her sacrifice and extraordinary effort in building the monastery church and cells remained in the memory of the nuns of Văratec Monastery, who remember her with gratitude to this day.

Later, as abbess, she showed the same care for the disciples whom she raised and formed spiritually, teaching them the words of Holy Scripture and encouraging them to copy the writings of the Holy Fathers for their own benefit and that of the entire community.

She did not concern herself solely with the visible aspects of administering the monastery, however important these were to Văratec's flourishing, but always maintained a living concern for the souls of the nuns in the community and for their salvation.

Distinctive, yet no less significant, was the philanthropic work of Saint Elizabeth Brâncoveanu. The daughter of a Great Logothete and wife of the last male descendant of the Brâncoveanu family, Saint Elizabeth Brâncoveanu owned extensive estates, donated to numerous monasteries, and organised and administered important social and philanthropic institutions to which she devoted herself wholeheartedly.

After arriving at Văratec Monastery, she confessed in one of the letters sent to her spiritual father that she felt weak and burdened by age, unable to perform any good deed and instead merely accumulating sin upon sin.

Such a confession, coming from a nun who founded a major hospital and endowed monasteries and churches, reveals a profound inner humility. Her contemporaries said that she performed works of charity in secret, without letting her left hand know what her right hand was doing, conducting herself as a gentle and loving mother rather than as a princess.

The canonisation of Saints Nazaria, Olympias, and Elizabeth of Văratec, together with the other 13 holy Romanian women, reveals God's blessed work among the Romanian people, from whom these holy women arose.

Through their spiritual lives, they enlightened the souls of nuns and lay believers, showing them the path of salvation in Christ.

Today, at this blessed moment of the local proclamation of the canonisation of Saints Nazaria, Olympias and Elizabeth of Văratec, we wish to express our appreciation and esteem for the hierarchs, clergy and faithful who have come with great love to honour these great hesychast ascetics, spiritual lights and icons of Văratec Monastery.

We pray that Saints Nazaria, Olympias and Elizabeth of Văratec, together with the Most Holy Theotokos and all the saints, may intercede before the Most Holy Trinity to grant us all peace and joy, health and salvation.

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