

Crete: Feast of the 99 Venerable Fathers of Azogyres at the site of their ascetic struggles



The sacred commemoration of Saint John the Hermit and the 98 God-bearing Fathers who accompanied him was celebrated in Azogyres, Selino, Crete.

This is the place where the 98 Venerable God-bearing Fathers practised asceticism and fell asleep in the Lord, with the exception of Saint John the Hermit, who, in his holy desire to pursue his spiritual struggles undisturbed, departed from the wild, inaccessible and secluded caves of Azogyres and sought another place of asceticism at Cape Melecha, near Chania.

The sacred celebrations were presided over by His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of Petra and Cherronisos, at the invitation of the local Shepherd, His Eminence Metropolitan Amphilochios of Kissamos and Selino.

With words of brotherly affection and love, His Eminence Metropolitan Amphilochios welcomed, greeted and thanked the visiting Hierarch, Metropolitan Gerasimos, stating: “Your Eminence and most beloved Brother, Metropolitan Gerasimos of Petra and Cherronisos, “It is with immense joy and great love that we welcome you to this sacred and holy place, sanctified by the prayers, prostrations, tears and supplications of our Venerable Father John the Hermit and the 98 God-bearing Fathers who accompanied him.

“We welcome you to your own homeland, for Selino has the joy and honour of being the place of your ancestral origins through your late father, Eftychios, a remarkable man of integrity, reverence and humanity, who came from Maralia in Selino.

“It is an honour for Selino that you are part of this land, but also that you continue to love the place of your origins. Not only have you never forgotten it, but whenever your many pastoral responsibilities permit, you return and open the family home of your late father, Eftychios.

“You have not merely kept this home open, but have also renovated it, keeping alight the lamp of remembrance, gratitude and prayer for your blessed and grace-filled father, the late Eftychios Marmatakis.

“I also thank you for your brotherly and sincere love towards my unworthiness, which you so generously extend to me, particularly during times of trials and temptations.

“As a remembrance of your blessed visit, we wish to present you with two particularly carefully prepared publications of the Municipality of Kantanos-Selino. The first concerns the frescoes preserved in the numerous Byzantine and post-Byzantine churches of the Province of Selino, while the second highlights the beauty of the region and its monuments.”

“In addition, we present you with an episcopal engolpion bearing the image of our Most Holy Theotokos, for you, too, are a child of the Panagia, having grown spiritually at the renowned and historic Holy Monastery of Panagia Agarathos, where the wonderworking Icon of Panagia Orphani is enshrined.”

With these words, His Eminence Metropolitan Amphilochios concluded his address

and invited the presiding Hierarch, Metropolitan Gerasimos, to speak.



His Eminence Metropolitan Gerasimos of Petra and Cherronisos, in his substantial, life-giving, accessible and profoundly theological address, first thanked Metropolitan Amphilochios for his “brotherly and gracious invitation”. He then expressed his emotion at returning, after 33 years, to “this blessed and sanctified place”, observing: “Our roots are here, and wherever our roots are, there also is our heart.” His Eminence subsequently referred to the 99 Venerable God-bearing Fathers, stating: “We are deeply moved by the prayer of these Venerable Fathers. When Saint John the Hermit announced to them that he would depart in search of a place more suitable for asceticism, what did they ask?

“They fervently prayed that the day of their departure from this present world might be the same for all of them. And so it came to pass. When Saint John fell asleep in the Lord, all 98 God-bearing Fathers also fell asleep. “What do we see in this? The unity they shared with one another in the name of Christ. “This is the very prayer of Christ Himself, His High Priestly Prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, when He asked God the Father that His disciples might be united, just as the Holy Trinity is united.

“What our Saints asked for is what we, too, must seek. “They show us a particular way of life. What is that way? It is the ascetic life, which is not intended only for

monks and ascetics, but for all of us. “It is an essential way of life because it grants us humility. It leads us beyond our own ego and helps us attract the grace of God. “God bestows His grace upon the humble, and it is then that true unity comes about, a unity experienced in the Mystery of the Divine Eucharist.”

Concluding his address, Metropolitan Gerasimos emphasised: “This is the path of unity with Christ that Saint John the Hermit and the 98 God-bearing Fathers who accompanied him reveal to us. It is the path that all of us need to follow and



of pilgrims from the wider
ays of festivities, the faithful
Fathers in Azogyres, Selino,
otion.





