

27/11/2019

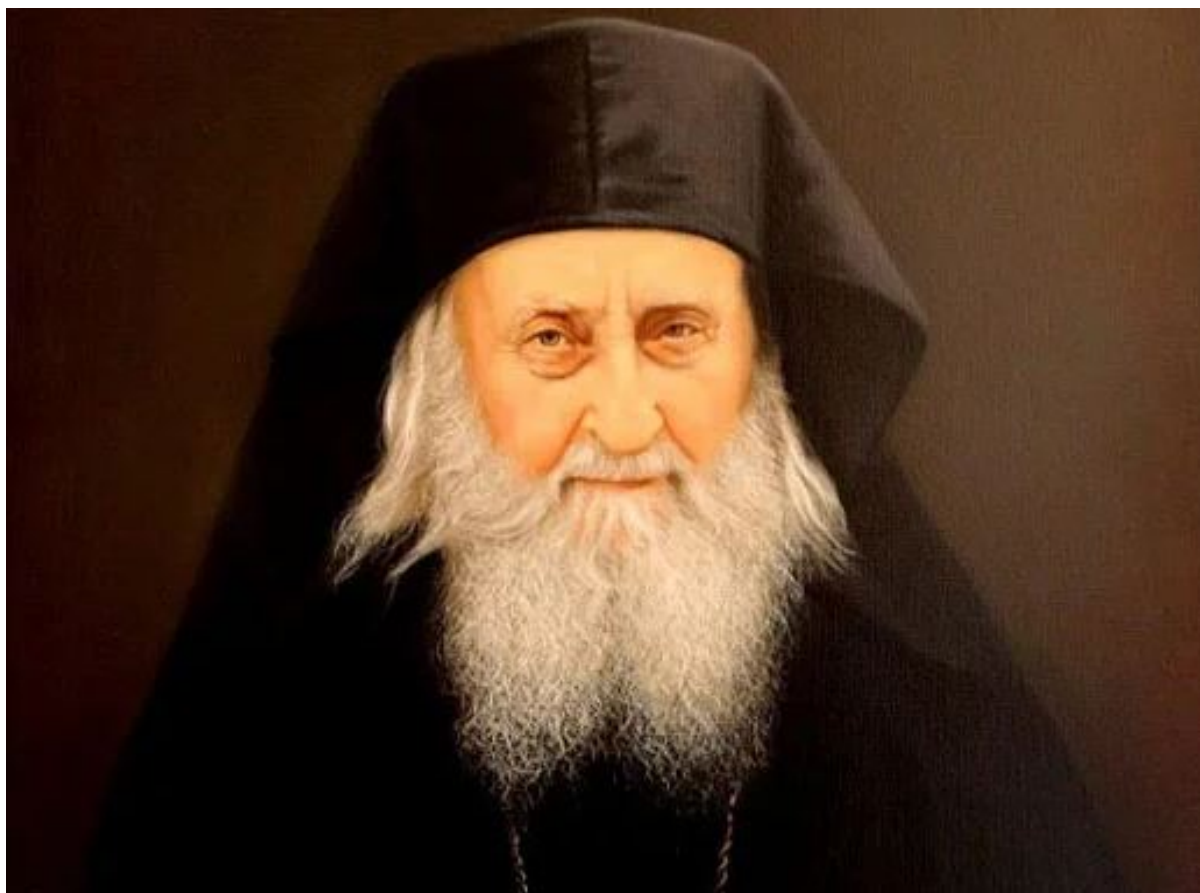
Ecumenical Patriarchate announces canonization of Ieronymos Simonopetritis, Sophronius of Essex



The **Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople** on Wednesday **announced the canonization of the Elder Ieronymos Simonopetritis and the Elder Sophronius Sakharov of Essex**, following the convening of the Patriarchate's Holy Synod earlier in the day.



Αγιορείτικη Φωτοθήκη



Elder Ieronymos Simonopetritis (1871-1957)

Childhood Years (1871-1888)

Elder Ieronymos was born in the village of Reiz-Dere in the Krini region of Asia Minor in 1871 to poor but devout parents, Nikolaos and Maria Diakoyiorgis.

The village was wholly Christian and lay five kilometres to the north-east of Alatsata and two and a half kilometres from the sea. Most of the inhabitants were farmers or vine-growers and had come originally from Crete or the Peloponnese.

At his baptism, he was given the name Ioannis. When he went to school he was a good student, surpassing the others in intelligence and maturity. As soon as he'd completed Primary School, the teacher sent him to the neighbouring little town for a short time to act as teacher.



The village church became the centre of his life. It was here that he found what his

soul was looking for: joy and God's blessing, which were poured out upon him through the sacraments, prayers and duties. He loved the services, the priests, the singers, the vigils and the chapels. He assisted the singers in the choir and the priests in the altar. He seemed to be older than he actually was because of his silence, seriousness and piety.

As a child of poor parents, he knew hardships from an early age, and later, as a monk, he would undertake these voluntarily and faithfully. We know very little about his childhood, but his mother clearly left the imprint of her love on him. It was from her that he first heard the lives of the saints, that he learned to fast, to pray and to love God. The saints were among his first friends. His family often discovered that he'd gone missing, but they knew they'd find him in the chapels. He was cured by Saint Dimitrios on two occasions: once when he terrible pains in his legs and again when he had chicken-pox. Both times he stayed in the church of the saint for forty days and fasted.

One evening, he heard his sister saying the Salutations to Our Most Holy Lady. In the morning, she asked him if he knew the Salutations. When he said that he didn't she told him: 'Now's your chance to learn'. 'From the age of seven I knew the Salutations by heart', the Elder would later say.

His mother's great faith became apparent before her death when she donned the monastic habit, which she'd loved since her childhood. She was renamed Melanie. His brother became a monk with the name of Maximos and there were three nuns in the family, Magdalene, Melanie and Kassiani, two of whom had previously been married. He also had more distant relatives who entered monasteries on the Holy Mountain or other parts of Greece.

At the age of twelve, he went to Chios with three other young boys to see the famous, discerning Elder, Saint Parthenios. The Elder was bent double and completely covered, so that the flesh on his face and hands wasn't visible. He lived in great asceticism in a cave next to the monastery of which he was the founder. He welcomed them by name, even though it was the first time he'd seen them. He told each of them the path they would follow in life, and was happy to tell Ioannnis that he'd become a monk.

Fr. Ieronymos later wrote: 'During my teenage years, I would think about how I could please the Lord. I chose the good and God-pleasing life of the monks because it's best suited to anyone wanting to follow the Lord with patience and devotion. He Himself says "Come to me all of you who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest". After receiving my father's blessing and the best wishes of my parents, as well, of course, as the Cross of the Lord as an invincible weapon, I went to the

Holy Mountain of Athos, since this this was the most suitable place and in accordance with my God-pleasing aim and decision’.

His father told him: ‘Go and don’t come back’. He said this because some would go but would then return home. He wanted his son to be serious.

Elder Ieronymos Simonopetritis: The First Years of his Service

Elder Ieronymos as a monk on the Holy Mountain (1888-1920)

Young Ioannis arrived on the Holy Mountain, made the sign of the cross and thanked Our Lady. Here his love for the Mother of God grew, to such an extent that, to his dying day, he would weep at saying or hearing her name. At the time when he arrived, there were more than 10,000 monks on Athos. Praising God, the seventeen-year-old Ioannis entered that holy location and passed through the gates of the Monastery of Simonopetra, in order to imitate the achievements of the saints of God. This was on 3 October 1888 and, on the 28th of the same month, his name was entered in the book of novices.

As he later wrote: ‘I was received by the Abbot, the venerable Elder, the late Archimandrite Neofytos, who was from Alatsata [close to Ioannis’ home village]... and I was received as a novice, performing regularly any task to which I was assigned.



The life he began there was one which thousands of monks had led before him: a life steeped in the remembrance of God, a mystical life with long daily services, frequent vigils and regular fasts. It consisted of the rule, duties, confession and holy communion. And in the midst of these everyday tasks, he continued where he'd left off back home, rejecting anything that was superfluous. He began to study the Scriptures, the ascetic fathers and the lives of the saints, drenching the pages of the books with his tears.

One of his first duties was that of 'konaktzis', looking after the 'konaki', the house where the monastery's representative in Karyes [the capital of the Holy Mountain] lived. He returned to the monastery after two and a half years, because of illness. For a short time he was sent to Dafni [the port of the Holy Mountain] and, for a few months to the dependencies on Limnos as cellarer [These dependencies were vital to the monastery which sent logs from its forests and brought back wine, for which the island was famous]. His obedience to the monastery's authorities is an indication of his humility.

After four and a half years of testing, on Palm Sunday 1893, he became a great schema monk, taking the name Ieronymos and he kept the date of June 15 in high regard, as being date of the commemoration of his patron saint. Once he'd been tonsured, new and greater struggles awaited him. One of the Elders wrote about

him: 'He burnt more petrol on reading than he drank water' [Petrol for the lamps]. He was always quiet, because he was internally vigilant. Often, when he was alone, he would shed rivers of tears. He'd never go near a fire, even though it was sometimes very cold. He never gave rest to his body, but would only snatch a little sleep sitting in a chair. And no human tongue can describe his abandonment of any personal property. This monk was the support of the monastery. He'd be ready with advice on the most insignificant of issues. He was entirely humble and was the pride and joy of the monastery [Many years ago, I made my first visit to the Mountain and had a letter of introduction to Simonopetra. The brotherhood had just arrived from Meteora and were still learning about their new monastery, but it was clear that they were in awe of a certain Elder Ieronymos, about whom they'd learned from the few remaining monks of the old brotherhood. WJL].

Out of respect for his monastic strivings, the brotherhood increasingly turned to him. They sent him the novices to be introduced into the monastic spirit. He spoke to them with great discretion. One late Elder, who was then a novice, wrote about what Elder Ieronymos told him: 'Have you come here to become a monk? Have you thought about it properly? The monastic life is a little rose for those who are pure... When you finish the duties that have been assigned to you, you go to your room and sit on the stool. There you'll voluntarily acquire self-reproach and you'll think about the fact that there's no other person for you, only our Lord Jesus Christ, who took away the sin of the whole human race. Then you'll begin the invisible warfare. When you say the sweet name of the Lord Christ, protect all the parts of your senses, which are glorifying God, lest a devil from the right should enter and separate you from the Lord's love through familiarity or pride'.

The young monk Ieronymos became the monastery's secretary, a duty he retained as Abbot. They then appointed him to the difficult task of overseeing all the external affairs of the monastery. He was obliged to leave the Holy Mountain regularly, meet with a variety of people and bring his affairs to a satisfactory conclusion. Early on he was appointed to responsible and difficult tasks involving visits to the monastery's dependencies. Without reservation, with exemplary obedience, he rose to the challenge of the demands of the monastery's overseers and spent long periods outside the monastery. He was involved in financial and administrative matters, but never for a moment lost the sense of his monastic calling or the need for inner communication with God.