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Last farewell to Elder Ephraim of Arizona at ‘spiritual oasis’ he co-founded in Sonoran Desert – (VIDEO)

Thousands of mourners and Orthodox faithful payed their last respects earlier today to a beloved Elder Archimandrite who transformed a remote and barren tract in the middle of Arizona’s Sonora Desert into a spiritual “oasis” and a venerable center of Christian Orthodoxy.

The funeral service for the Elder Ephraim of Arizona, at the Monastery of St. Anthony, which he co-founded with six other Athonite monks, was broadcast live by the Orthodoxia News Agency.

Watch the full funeral service:

The Elder Ephraim of Arizona reposed in the Lord late on Saturday evening.

More than 4,000 mourners attended today’s funeral service and interment of Elder Ephraim of Arizona, who reposed in the Lord on Sunday morning at the St. Anthony Orthodox Monastery in Florence, Arizona.

The Archbishop of America, His Eminence Elpidophoros, co-officiated at the funeral service along with the Metropolitan of Atlanta, His Eminence

Alexios, the Metropolitan of San Francisco, His Eminence Gerassimos, and the Metropolitan of Denver, His Eminence Isaiah.

The Abbot of the Monastery of Philotheou, the Elder Archimandite Nikodimos, represented the Mt. Athos Monastery where the Elder Ephraim of Arizona was once the hegumen, or Abbot, along with several other Athonite Fathers and Ephraim's spiritual offspring from around the world.

The reposed Elder was a pioneer of Orthodox monasticism in North America, helping found numerous monasteries in the United States and Canada, and creating a spiritual "oasis" and venerable Orthodox Christian outpost in the barren Sonora Desert.

The Hieromonk first arrived in the United States in 1979 to establish and co-found 19 monasteries in America and Canada, including St. Anthony.

The Elder Ephraim was born to pious and loving parents in the central Greece port city of Volos in 1928 as Ioannis Moraitis. At the age of 19, he traveled to Mount Athos to become a monk and was one of the spiritual pupils of the Elder Iosif (Joseph) the Hesychast.

In 1973, Ephraim was elected as the Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Philotheou on Mt. Athos.

The Holy Monastery of St. Anthony, located outside the small Arizona city of Florence, was established in 1995 by six Athonite Monks, including the Elder Ephraim. Today, 40 Orthodox monks live there in a coenobitic community, including North American converts to Orthodoxy. The Abbot is Elder Archimandrite Paisios.