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New Saint Canonized in Constantinople



Phanar—A new saint has been recognized by the Orthodox Church. In a Wednesday August 31, 2022 ceremony at the Patriarchal Church of St. George, His All-Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed the synodal act of the canonization of Saint Vissarion the Agathonite, together with the hierarchs of the Holy Synod, who approved the canonization (Αγιοκατάταξης) on June 14, 2022, after a report of a synodal committee on canonization was presented.

The Life of St. Vissarion the Agathonite

Saint Vissarion the Agathonite was a clergyman of the Holy Metropolis of Fthiotida and a brother of the Holy Dormition Monastery of Agathon at the foot of Mount Oiti. He was born Andrew Korkoliakos in 1908 in Petalidi, Messinia, Greece. At the age of 18 he went to Kalamata where he met various spiritual figures and resolved to become a clergyman. He was tonsured a monk soon after receiving the name Vissarion. Shortly thereafter, he was was ordained to the diaconate and later a priest, and honored with the offikion of Archimandrite.

Saint Vissarion was a man of constant study. He was deeply versed in the Holy Scriptures, and had a comprehensive understanding of church history and theology, as well as Orthodox hymnography and liturgical texts.

He went to Karditsa, Greece in 1935 at the invitation of the Metropolitan of Karditsa Ezekiel (also a Messinian) where he dedicated himself to the work pastoral ministry. For his entire life, he devoted himself deeply to charitable projects oriented toward social welfare and alleviation of suffering. This intense devotion remained with him to the point of death. As he laid dying, he never ceased to ask with tireless concern about the children, the poor, the church, and the community from his hospital bed.

Saint Vissarion undertook many difficult and dangerous missions. Among them were during the World War II German occupation of Greece, during which he is said to have aided many, and through his personal intervention, saved children captured by the Axis invaders.

Following the Second World War, Greece was ravaged by a bloody Civil War. It was during this time that Saint Vissarion, already an Archimandrite with a long ascetic life rife with spiritual labor and social work, left Karditsa and arrived at the Agathonos Monastery in 1955, which was influenced by the Peloponnesian ascetic, Father Germanos Dimakos.

At Agathonos, he served the division of the Monastery that undertook charitable projects in the local community. This effected a fruitful mission outside the walls of the monastery, in addition to his work within it. For instance, every Monday and Tuesday he visited to the Hospitals of Lamia, saw the patients, comforted them, and nourished them with the Holy Sacraments of the church. It was with his charismatic personality, overflowing with love for people, and his sweet and simple way that he managed to relieve their pain.

When he was in the Monastery, especially in front of the Church, he cheerfully greeted the people with his brilliant smile, and often listened with care as they shared their problems. While these people entered the monastery burdened with pain, suffering and anxiety, they left with peace and relief after speaking with him.

He also helped many people financially. Pilgrims entrusted him with offerings of money and other resources, and he saw that they were distributed to the poor and those in need. He would constantly say, “outside people are poor, outside they are hungry, we must help them.”

Every Lent he left the Monastery with the blessing of Elder Germanos and traveled from one end of the Prefecture of Fthiotidos to the other, visiting and assisting anyone he encountered. But his main duty was facilitating the sacrament of confession, for which he was eagerly awaited in the local villages. He also had the special role of the confessor of the Seminarians at the Ecclesiastical Lyceum of Lamia and became their spiritual mentor.

When Saint Vissarion died, his body was taken to the monastery for burial. At that time, access to the Monastery was difficult due to heavy snowfall. For two days his body lied in the Church, and many people came weeping to bid farewell to their Elder. Those who witnessed this moment testify that his face was shining and his body was fragrant. Due to the poor weather conditions, his body could not be buried in the cemetery and was therefore interred in the Baptistry, where there were rooms reserved for confession.

After his internment, many pilgrims travelled to the monastery to venerate his tomb and many brought him offerings, as if to a Saint, even prior to signs and

miracles that to demonstrated his holiness. There are reports of the amazing experiences some of these pilgrims had in the Elder’s tomb.

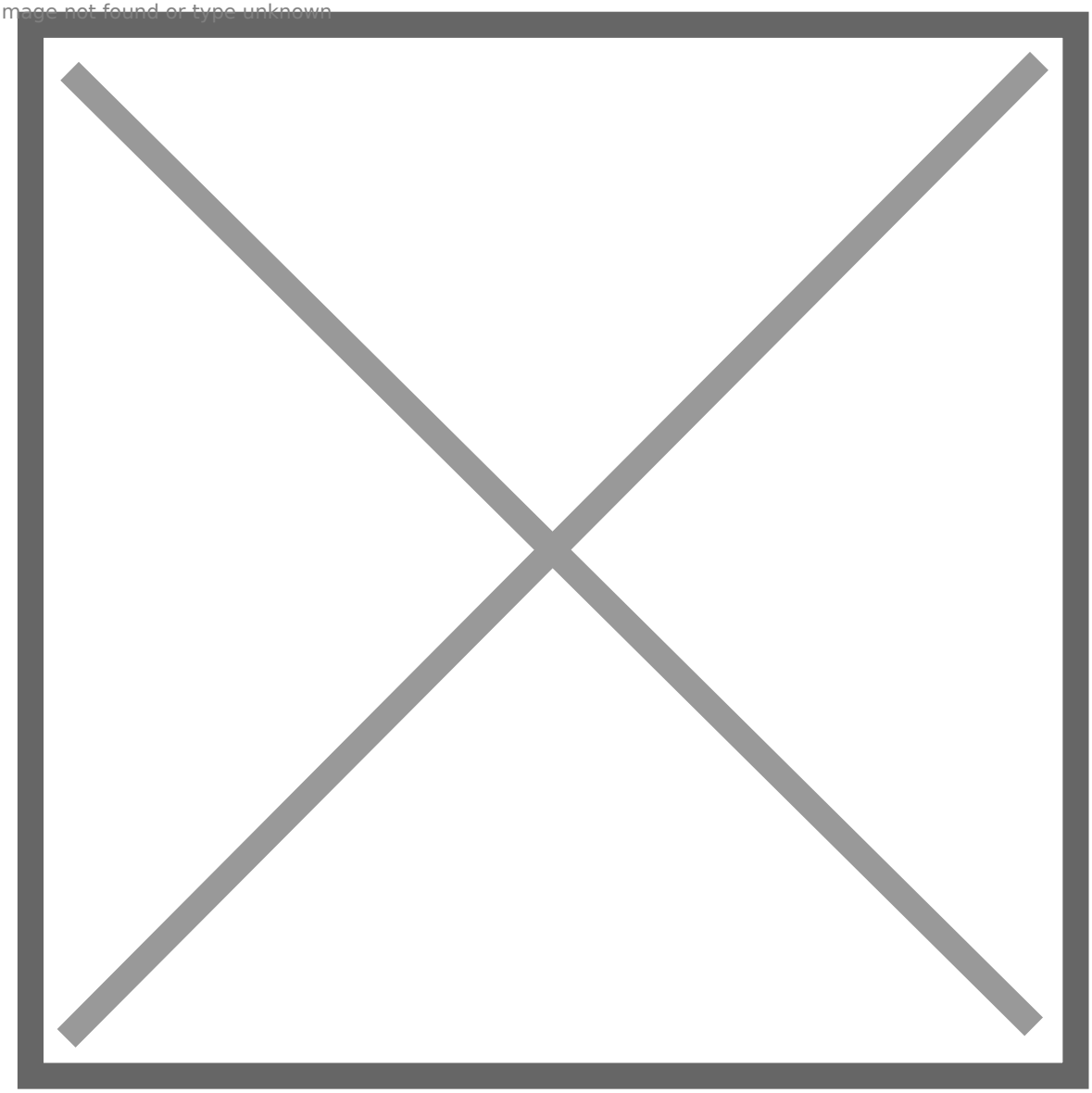
At one point the question of exhuming his body presented itself, and it was ultimately decided not to exhume, but rather, to upgrade the Baptistry. However, during the renovations, structural damage occurred that necessitated significant demolition and reconstruction. Therefore the exhumation had to be done.

On the appointed day, after the Trisagion, the removal of the bricks began. The coffin appeared to be in excellent condition. It was taken to the cemetery’s ossuary where his bones would be placed. When the monks opened the coffin to remove the bones, they were surprised to find that his body under the shroud was incorrupt. This was a miraculous event of divine economy.

Despite the fact that all the Monks testified to Fr. Vissarion’s holiness, the Church had to examine the case. When Metropolitan Nicholas of Fthiotidos learned what had happened, he was astonished and visited the Monastery, and venerated the relics of the Saint with deep emotion. Later, the incorrupt body of the Elder was transferred to the chapel of the Holy Trinity to be safeguarded. Since then it has been there to be venerated by thousands.

Through the grace of God, this quiet, humble elder shook the world, particularly impacting the Balkan lands. After fifteen years, his body was found to be fully intact. One particularly extraordinary aspect is that his hands still grasp the Holy Gospel in such a way that it cannot not being easily taken away from him, as if to exhorts the faithful, and especially the Priests, to never stray from it.

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The Canonization Ceremony

Wednesday’s ceremony was held in Istanbul, at the the Church of Saint George in the Phanar. It was attended by Hierarchs of the Throne and faithful from all over the world, as well as Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Messinia and Metropolitan Symeon of Fthiotida, who led a group of over 250 faithful to the global center of Orthodox Christianity. Many of these people had personal contact and experiences with the saint. Joining the special group from Fthiotida was government representative, Ioannis Oikonomou, the Deputy Minister of Tourism, Sofia Zacharakis, the Members of the Hellenic Parliament of Fthiotida, Themistoklis Heimaras and Yannis Sarakiotis, the Regional Governor of Central Greece, Fanis Spanos, as well as various mayors of the Prefecture. Representative Christos Staikouras of Fthiotida, and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Hellenism Abroad, Andreas Katsaniotis.

Mr. Staikouras and Mr. Oikonomou both met with the Ecumenical Patriarch, in addition to attending the signing ceremony of the canonization of Saint Vissarion of Agathonite, in the Patriarchal Church. Mr. Oikonomou expressed that “Saint Vissarion the Agathonite was a cleric of the Metropolis of Fthiotida and brother of the Holy Monastery of the Dormition of the Virgin Agathonos. The [collective] memory of his ministry and the experiences of his love and support, which he generously offered to people, is the living testimony of his life and how he was perceived.”

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