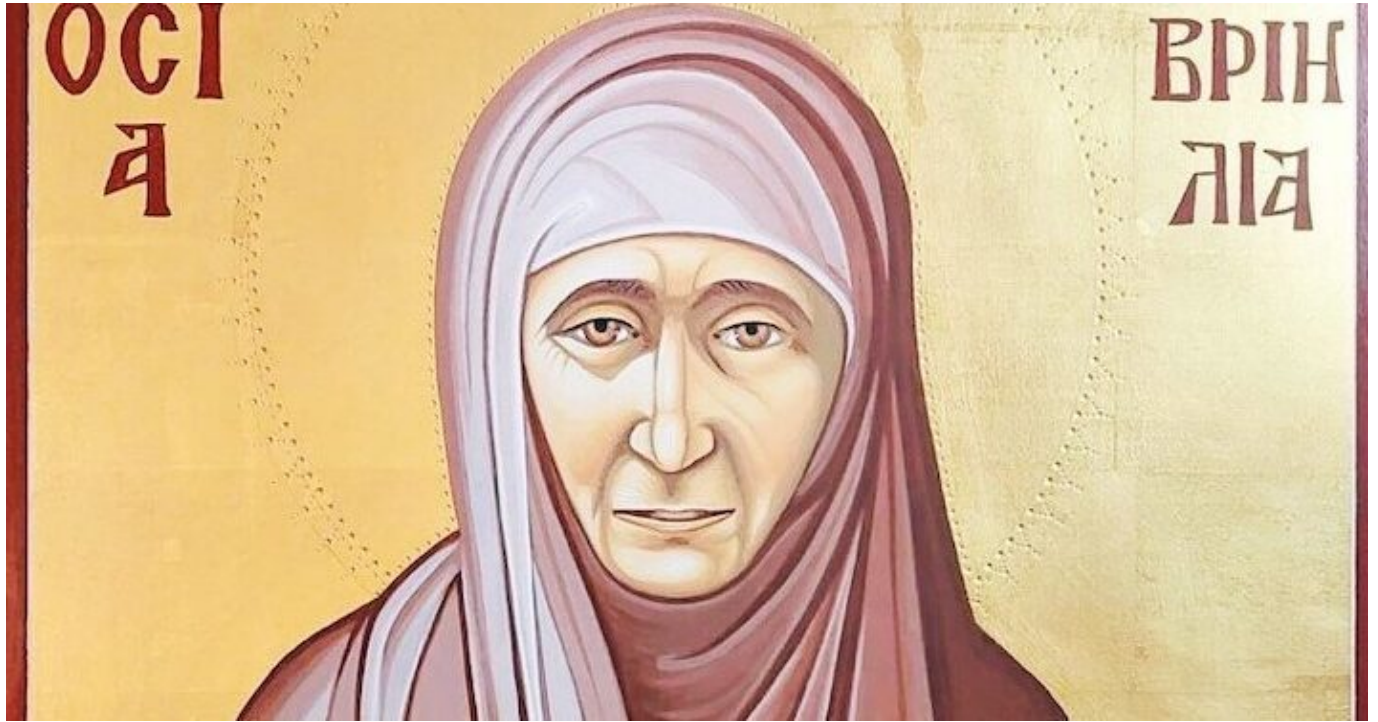


Canonisation of Gerontissa Gavrielia was decided by the Ecumenical Patriarchate



The Holy and Sacred Synod of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, which met yesterday, 3 October 2023, decided to canonise Gerontissa Gavrielia Papagianni at the proposal and urging of the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew.

Short biography of Gerontissa Gavrielia

Elder Gavriilia Papagianni was born on October 2/15, 1897 (the feast day of Saints Cyprian and Justine) in Constantinople. Her father was a wealthy timber merchant and lived in an environment with many comforts in the city, in the Phanar. She was a cute little girl, full of love for the whole world.

On the days when the Papagianni mansion was “receiving”, the joy of little Aurelia, immediately ran to open and welcome the visitors. She was the fourth and last child of the family. Of her siblings, Vasiliki, the eldest, was the first who spoke to her about God. Along with the stories she read to her, she told her stories from the Gospel and the Old Testament.

Then one day she told her that God is “omnipresent” and that whatever we do, He sees it... Then little Aurelia, who was 4 or 5 years old, lost her mind and asked in a frightened voice: “What if I go and lock myself in that cupboard, will He find me?”

“Yes”, she said to her. “Well, what if I get little by little and go into that matchbox and there he will see me?” “And there.”

Then she understood that life is a serious business and that we can't go on doing mischief all the time, but we must be good children because “He who is everywhere” sees us! She then burst into tears and crawled into her sister's arms. “I mean, I'm lost!”.

The years went by and little Aurelia loved the whole world and the whole world loved her! After high school, she left to continue her studies in Switzerland at the School of Agriculture in Estavayer-Le-Lace. She particularly loved plants and literally until the end of her life she “talked” with them, as if she could see their response every time.

In 1923 she was in Thessaloniki with her family. There she entered Aristotle University at the Faculty of Philosophy.

After the end of her studies, she arrived in Athens and her first concern was to get a job. So she got a job in a psychiatric clinic where she stayed for only one year. Then came England, alone with her only possession, a British paper pound.

Her adventure in Christ was just beginning... There she found various jobs while helping a number of needy and unemployed people, and caring for many poor people free of charge.

And in 1954, the year of a milestone in her spiritual life. It was March 24, the day her mother passed away. For her, the great adventure of Faith in Christ was just beginning. From then on, she began her great mission to the five continents of the world. In 1954 she went to India where she stayed for 5 years. It was a great milestone in her life and she especially loved India. There she helped incessantly a multitude of lepers and sick people and showed them, boundless love!

Everyone loved her and called her Sister Leela. In her busy daily schedule, two hours of Bible reading and many hours of prayer were essential. She had complete trust in God and therefore never kept money on her.

Everything was given to her by Him, she said. All she did was put herself in His hands. Airline tickets, food, lodging, and everything else she needed were given to her by God. She helped multitudes of people while being the cause of many people being baptised Orthodox Christians. She never told others about Christ unless they asked her to.

She made important contacts (Mother Teresa, Sivananda, Baba Amte). She was

invited to various countries to speak about Orthodox Christianity and she really left the crowds speechless.

After India, she was in the Himalayas for a year on a meager diet, “alone with God”, in hours of endless prayer. She would later say that during that year she experienced contemplative monasticism without even knowing it!

She now believed that she was doing God’s will when suddenly the message came to her from the angels as she said, “Now you are able to go to be a nun”. Then she understood that monasticism is a special and superior way of life. She left the matter open and believed that God would once again guide her.

So she met a gentleman who asked her to accompany her to Bethany to a monastery. The fare was once again miraculously found and so she went to Bethany, at the age of 62(!), where she stood out for her love and patience.

And just when she thought that this would now be her life, she started traveling again to help, to talk about Christ, and to be loved by the whole world.

Then in Athens, where she had surgery to cure the 100% blindness of her left eye. When the operation was performed, “light was born”. She remained in Athens at the Holy Monastery of Evangelistria, the New Jerusalem, as she used to say. Through the monastery, she corresponded and helped many people.

Next came Africa, where she stayed in the house of the angels, as her spiritual children called it, where she received and helped suffering people every day, Aegina and Leros, where she passed away at the age of 95, on March 28, 1992, raising her hands to heaven...

At that moment her spiritual children heard clearly a young voice singing a melody unknown, joyful, angelic... This lasted only a few seconds and then a silence filled her cell...

All the bells of Leros rang mournfully. The Funeral Service was sung, and while the nuns were escorting her to the grave, the Bishop wanted to see her face for the last time. Those who saw it made the sign of the Cross and said that there are no words to describe the divine face of the person they saw...

Gerontissa Gavrielia was a rare person with boundless love for her neighbour. She also deserved to acquire the gift of insight. She said that the angels once told her that what matters most is the amount and quality of love you give to others without discrimination!

Everyone asked her how it was possible for her to love even strangers so much and how it was possible for her to be obedient to the whole world and travel constantly to help even one person. So her life is rightly described as the ascetic life of love!

She was once described by a foreign missionary as a “bad Christian” because unlike the other missionaries in India of other religions who knew many native dialects, she knew none and spoke only English, she replied that she knew five languages: The first is smile, the second is tears, the third is touch, the fourth is prayer and the fifth is love. With these five languages, she traveled around the world. Then the missionary asked her to say these “five languages” again so that he could write to her...

