

Teaching from the Bishop Ioan, hermit and hesychast\* in the mountains at the Agaia monestary in Moldavia.

## About the importance of the food for the true christian

In the Karpat Mountains in Moldavia bishop Ioan lived around the 1940's, as a hermit. Father Theodulus, who was confessor at the Agapia monestary at that time, met this hermit some times up among the mountains, when wandering on the path between the Agapia and the Sihastria monasteries. His stories about his meetings with the bishop and hermit, is to read in the book "Spiritual conversations with Romanian Elders".

In one of these conversations father Ioan was teaching among other things about the vital importance of food for the true practising christian.

This is how the great hesychast\* give the food different kinds of qualities;

A. *Carnivores*, who always eat meat. These are in the lowest degree of fasting, even if they sometimes restrain themselves from food. They are never able to advance in prayer.

B. *Lacto-vegetarians*, who never eat meat, but only milk, cheese, eggs, and all kinds of boiled vegetables. These are in the second degree of fasting, which is kept by monks in coenobitic monasteries and, very rarely by laymen.

C. *Vegetarians*, who eat only vegetables and boiled or raw legumes. This arrangement forms the third degree of fasting, and the most zealous monks of the common life keep it.

*From here on begin the strictest degrees of fasting, which are usually kept by hesychast monks and the most ascetic desert-dwellers.*

D. *Fruit-eaters*, who eat bread and uncooked fruits once a day, without otherwise ever tasting food. He who attains this degree of fasting is able to master his body and thoughts without difficulty and can advance rapidly on the path of prayer.

E. *Cereal-eaters* comprise the fifth degree of fasting. To this degree belong monks – especially hesychasts\* and desert-dwellers – who eat once a day only black bread, cereals, and soaked grains of wheat, corn, millet, lentils, beans, peas, etc.

F. *Dry food* is the sixth degree of monastic fasting, which is usually attained only by the most zealous desert-dwellers. Those who live in this harsh asceticism eat only dried bread soaked in water, with salt or a little vinegar, once a day and by measure. This is how the hesychasts of the Nile valley lived.

G. *Divine food or manna* is the last and highest degree of monastic fasting, which is attained by very few ascetics after prolonged asceticism, being strengthened by the grace of the Holy Spirit. These are satisfied with the Most Pure Mysteries alone, that is, with the Body and Blood of Christ, which they receive once or twice a week, without tasting anything else but water only. After difficult temptation and asceticism, and by the grace of God, I have come to be satisfied with the Most Pure Mysteries alone, and no longer feel hunger, or have need of bread and vegetables. "The Lord takes care of me, I feel neither the cold of winter, nor the intense heat of the sun, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor any other earthly need."

Father Theodulus continues; "I noticed then that this great hesychast\* did not want to talk long, so as not to interrupted the Jesus Prayer which he had in his mind and heart, I thanked him from my heart for the counsels and profitable words he had given me. I made a prostration to him, kissed his hand and asked his blessing to leave. And the holy Bishop Ioan blessed me with the sign of the holy cross and said to me: "May our Lord Jesus Christ bless you and forgive me".

\* The inner continous Jesus Prayer is characteristic of the hesychast (from Greek *hesykia*, state of piece, resting in God) spiritual activity of the eastern piety and mystery.

The gospel of St. Luke 5

<sup>33</sup> And they said to Him, "John's disciples fast and pray frequently, as do those of the Pharisees as well; but Yours both eat and drink."<sup>34</sup> And Jesus said tho them, "Can the wedding guests be made to fast while the bridegroom is with them?"<sup>35</sup> But the time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them, and in those days they will fast."

Revelation 2

<sup>17</sup> "Whoever has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the victor I shall give some of the hidden manna..."

