

An Interview About the Miraculous Icon of St. Anna

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The Myrrh-Streaming Icon of St. Anna began to spontaneously “weep” myrrh on May 9, 2004 – Mother’s Day – in the Russian Orthodox Church of our Lady of Joy of All Who Sorrow in Philadelphia. Parishioners noticed that the icon appeared to be perspiring,

and upon closer inspection, Fr. Athanasy, who was the rector there at the time, realized that the icon was producing an oily liquid that looked like tear drops, as if the Saint were crying.

The icon is a miracle-working icon. Many women who have had difficulty conceiving a child, or who were told they were infertile, have conceived after praying in the icon's presence.



On July 20, 2007, Khouria Frederica Mathewes-Greene interviewed Archimandrite Athanasy (Mastalski) about the wonder-working icon of St. Anna which was commissioned in Jerusalem and of which he is the owner and guardian. The icon began to stream myrrh several years before the interview and Fr. Athanasy has since then traveled extensively with the icon and St. Anna has worked many miracles. Father had brought the icon to Holy Apostles parish in Beltsville, MD where he was interviewed by Khouria Frederica.

This interview originally appeared in audio format at Khouria Frederica's Ancient Faith Ministries podcast "Frederica Here and Now" and is posted here in text format by permission.

—I'm talking with Fr. Athanasy who was blessed to have this icon begin to weep in his church. Tell me the story of when this happened and when it was first noticed?

—The icon started to exude myrrh three years ago on American Mother's Day. It just happened to be that day and I remember it for that reason. A son of Fr. Victor Potapov was visiting our church and he asked if I noticed that the icon was wet around the

cuffs, which I hadn't noticed, and so we went to inspect the icon after church, and indeed it appeared to be wet around the cuffs and around the gold that was all around the icon. So I immediately said to our parishioners "Don't touch, and we'll take pictures." My people were very obedient that time, so three days later when we lifted the icon up off the anoly to take the picture the back of the icon was inundated with myrrh going up the back of it.

—So from the whole surface it was just exuding and coming out? It wasn't weeping at that point?

—At that point it wasn't. Whatever it was doing, which we didn't know and obviously more than just the cuffs, which we didn't know either, the myrrh traveled. The icon was slanted and it traveled up the back of the icon in the frame. So when we lifted it up we were overwhelmed by that beautiful aroma.

—That fragrance was there right at the start?

—Yes. So we took pictures and sent a report to the local bishop, to the metropolitan, and to the deans, and we waited from May until October for the metropolitan to visit. Metropolitan Laurus visited and venerated the icon and inspected it, and by that time people had already been asking for us to travel. Metropolitan Herman had asked us to visit. And so I asked permission and our metropolitan gave his permission for her to visit wherever, which was a wonderful, wonderful thing.

—So although you were the pastor of a ROCOR church you were able to visit other jurisdictions? [Ed. note: The icon began to exude myrrh a few years before the reunion between ROCOR and the Moscow Patriarchate].

—Yes, we visited other jurisdictions. She was indeed our ambassador of good will. We know that St. Anna is the grandmother of Christ, and she traveled to be everyone's grandmother.

—She would be the best I think.

—She is the best. The story is that when I was seven years old I fell out the window on the second story of a building, and I had a compound fracture in my arm and the doctors had trouble getting a pulse. I had a very gifted Japanese doctor who told my mother that after they got the pulse he would fix it. He put it in traction and held the

bones together with pins, but then took it all out. I was in traction from July until October, if you can believe it. Today you can go for a heart operation and get out immediately. The arm was knitted together and I have a small vaccination mark from where the pin came out, so there's nothing fake in my arm. I grew up Catholic and my mother's name is Anna, in fact, and someone gave her oil from St. Anna in a local parish. She made the cross on my arm and by that time the doctors found a pulse, and it had been an hour or so. And indeed I have this arm.

—You have the full use of that arm, so that was miraculous.

—Yes it was. Doctors said I would possibly have arthritis later in life and I do. I have it everywhere but in this arm. And so not wanting to be like one of the ten lepers I remember St. Anna every year. I would go to some church to pray to her and thank her.

—When is her feast, by the way?

—In the Catholic Church it's July 26. In the Orthodox Church on the new calendar she falls on July 25, and we are thirteen days later. I always went to a Catholic church and prayed and lit candles. Wherever I was stationed I would find St. Anna's church. And I thought, "You are the priest—you could have an icon made, and you could get blessed oil." I was stationed in Jerusalem and I served there for years, so I asked the sisters at the Mount of Olives to do an icon. Someone asked me how old is the icon and I said that the icon is very young, but St. Anna is very old. The icon is probably about twelve years old now, that's all.



The icon was sent to my parish and I told my story and many women were cured by blessed oil. The first year we blessed thirty bottles, last year we blessed one thousand, and this year we're going to bless 1,500. I call it "St. Anna's Gold." These beginning miracles were particularly with women problems and people donated silver hearts to thank her for that. After the metropolitan blessed it to travel then we went full-steam. Then the tears came—sometimes more, sometimes less, and finally a stream. I remember one time at the end of choir practice they said "Father, the icon was dry, and by the end of practice it's full." So we take her around and everywhere I go there are miracles of St. Anna.

— Can you tell me one of the stories?

—A little boy from Russia was suffering terribly from cancer and we prayed for him. I can't guarantee anything, I don't know anything. You pray and your heart goes out to

people. He was cured. He came to me about three months ago and he threw his arms around me and he said, "Father, I don't have cancer anymore," and I said, "Yes, I know." We had a woman who was pregnant and the doctor's said the baby was dead and they would have to remove her baby. That was on a Friday and she was supposed to go to the hospital on Monday. Archbishop Anthony of the Ukrainian Church counseled the subdeacon and his wife to anoint themselves with the oil, which they did. They were frantic. Then they went to the doctor on Monday and the doctor asked, "Did you come here for an abortion?" And she looked and said, "What do you mean an abortion?" And he said, "You have a perfectly healthy baby." And the icon went to that baby's baptism. There was a matushka and priest that couldn't have children and they adopted two. After St. Anna's visit they had their own. I went to Bayonne three weeks ago and some people introduced themselves and said, "Father, we lost two babies. Last year we were here and prayed, and after nine months this is our Anna." There was another man from Georgia who my heart was going out to. They couldn't have children and every time I went the wife came and prayed. And I thought, "My God, what can I do?" I was there the day before my birthday and the priest came to me and said, "Father, Mirov and his wife cannot be here today—his wife just gave birth to a baby boy!" I said, "On my birthday!"

You know, it's all in God's time and we have to learn that. In the psalm in the prayer before eating it says, The eyes of all in hope look to You and You open Your hand in due season and satisfy the desire of every living thing (Ps. 145:15-16). And these things are in God's season, not ours. No matter how much we may entreat and wonder why it doesn't happen, God is always on time.

—That's true; in His time.



—People ask me, “Father, does the weeping mean something bad?” I say, “No. God doesn’t need to give us perks from heaven. Read the newspaper, watch the TV, look in your own family life, look in your own soul. You don’t need this type of thing to let you know there’s trouble.”

I see that where she goes she brings peace and love. She is the grandmother of Christ. Russians say “Babushka,” and what Mom and Dad won’t give you Baba will give you. Remember the holidays—“Baba made this,” “Baba made that.” I went to a monastery of wonderful nuns up in the Poconos and I asked the abbess, “Do Greeks get the same feeling when you say ‘Yia Yia?’” and the nuns just grinned from ear to ear, and the abbess said, “Father, we never thought of that.” And people don’t.

This is the grandmother of Christ. This is our grandmother. And, in due time. She did her thing. In California the first Greek Orthodox Church has been dedicated in honor of

St. Anna, with a relic of part of her foot brought from Mt. Athos, and other people have told me in Athens there's a parish of St. Anna that's just been dedicated.

—My neighbor is protestant and I was trying to talk to her about this concept of the saints interceding for us, and she said "I'm going to just keep going straight to Jesus." Do you have an answer for that? It's as if we're being accused of thinking that the Lord is not enough, or you have to twist His arm. But it's not like that.

—It says in Scripture that the Lord is wonderful in His saints (Ps. 67:35), doesn't it? And that's what He says. The saints are God's holy people. We are called to be saints; we're not called to be angels. People misunderstand that today. When they lose a child they say, "He's gone to be an angel." No. They're not angels. The angle's theme song is "I Ain't Got No Body." We've become part of God's holy people. There are people that we identify with because they've fought the good fight and have gone through the things that we've suffered, and we identify with the Church Triumphant. The saints went marching in, and they're not nobodies. They're somebodies. And they're part of the human race.

When we read the Gospel to the Mother of God we hear Christ say, Yea blessed are they rather who hear the word of God and keep it (Lk. 11:28). Who amongst all humanity has kept the word of God better than the mother of God? She is humanity's "yes" to God. She is the new Eve. She is "Eva" spelled backward—"Ave"—that's what she is. She is our "yes." Wordsworth said it well. He said "Woman of tainted nature's solitary boast. Woman above all women glorified." And she leads us. God chose her. He could have just said, "Hey, here I am," but He chose one of us and He used her, and she's not to be put aside.

When you're sick you don't go to the general doctor. You go to someone who knows or went through it—the patron of teeth, the patron of this or that. And yes, we can always go to Jesus. And these saints heal us through Christ. We say, "Pray for me." In English we say, "I pray thee." We say to these people that we know who have gone before us, "I pray thee, speak a good word to Jesus for me." And they do. And the more people you have on your cause the better you are. You're afraid to go before men in this world unless you have someone at your back or putting in a good word for you. Why not have

more people on our side who have fought the good fight and are trying to help us fight it too?

—I think the wrong impression is to picture it like a bureaucracy. It seems to me that when we seek to the Lord we're never speaking to Him in isolation from all of creation. And all of the saints and everyone is standing around and we can be speaking and pleading Him and then say, "Mary, help me out here," and get her to chime in too.

—It says in Scripture we're surrounded by a choir of witnesses.

—Yes, the great cloud of witnesses in Hebrews 12.

—Where are they? Are they locked up somewhere being nobodies until the last day? No, they are not. Listen, we are rich, because everyone that has fought the good fight is part of us. We have a claim to their friendship if we want it, just as we can walk with angels. All of heaven is ours because we are baptized in the Church.

—It's a very great gift.

—It is, isn't it?

—Thank you so much, Father.

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