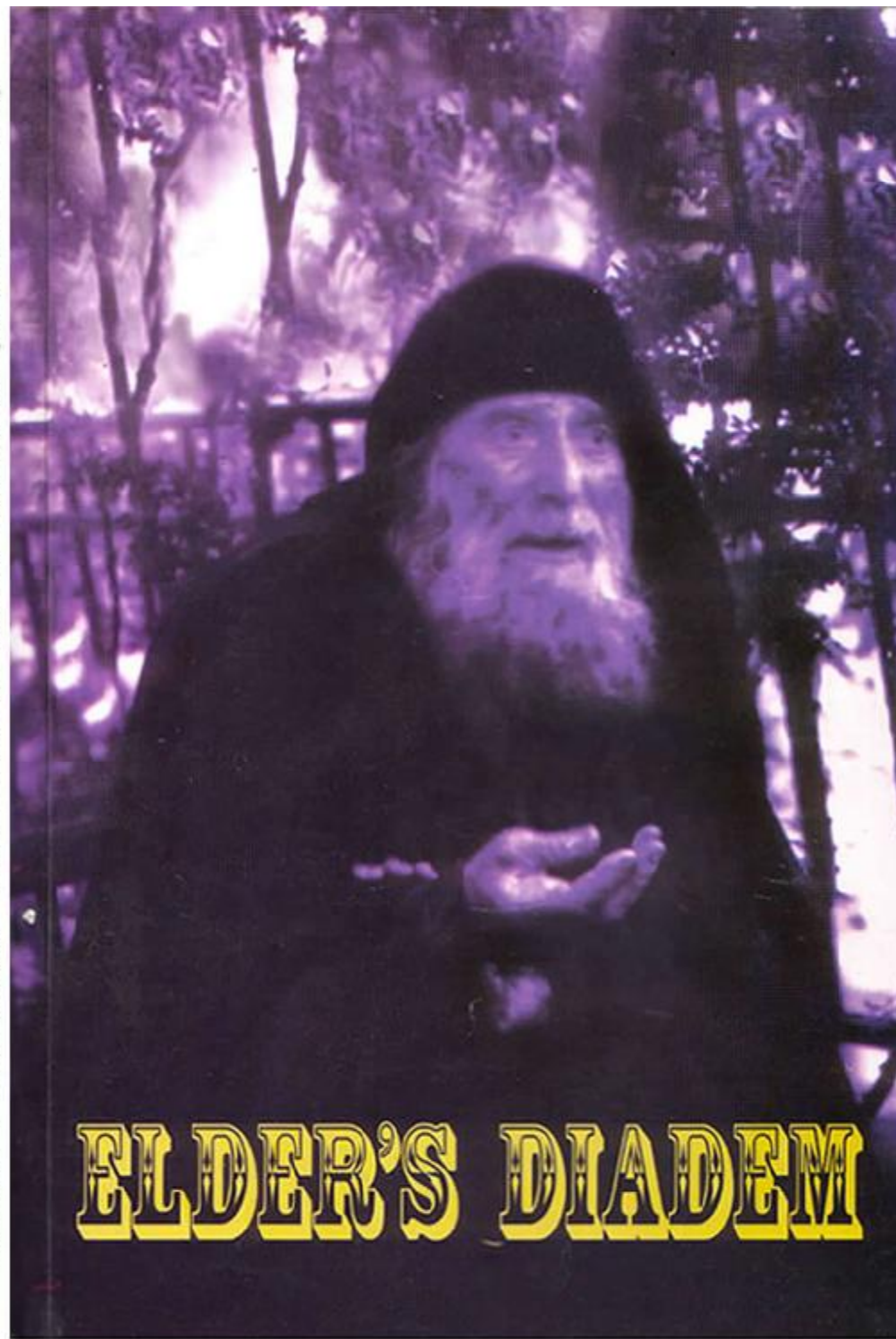


ELDER'S DIADEM - ARCHIMANDRITE GABRIEL (URGEBADZE)



Equal-to-the-Apostles Saint Nino Convent of Samtavro

Mtskheta

ELDER'S DIADEM

Dali Mshvenieradze

Tbilisi

2008

UDK 27-36+27-788-051.1(479.22)
M-91

*Printed by the blessing of His Eminence
Archbishop Seraphim (Jojua)*

Translated from Georgian by : Ana Memarnishvili

Design: by Nino Bolkvadze

Translator's Note

*I wish to express my sincere greatfulness and thanks to Irene Bukia,
Natalie Babitsky for sparing neither time nor efforts while going
over the text several times in their editorial work, for valuable
suggestions and comments*

*We would like to express our thanks to Georgi Pavliashvili for his
suport in printing the book*

ISBN 978-9941-0-0605-0



**Miracle-working Iveron icon of the Most Holy Theotokos
donated in 1912 by the Georgian Monastery of the Holy
Mount of Athos to Samtavro Convent**

*The book is dedicated to
Archimandrite Gabriel (Urgebadze)*

*Extraordinary life, odd manners, inexplicable words,
but what is more important, particular love for
Christ, for neighbour were precious virtues of father
Gabriel who was carrying exceptionally rare feat of
“salos” in our times.*

Archbishop Seraphim (Jojua)



Some Episodes from Elder Gabriel's Life

"... if you have faith as small as a mustard seed, you can say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there' and it will move. Nothing will be impossible for you."

(Matthew 17:20)

For a lay-fellow it is rather difficult to perceive the whole depth of Father Gabriel's remarkable spiritual life.

Through his firm belief in God and genuine love for a neighbour, he was trying to convince everyone that earthly life is a preparation for the Heavenly Kingdom and that Christ's love can be expressed only through love towards a neighbour.

And it was his love that spurred him to ascend the narrow path leading to Heaven, as "No-one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the Kingdom of God" (Luke 9:62).

Not only among seculars but even among clericals it is hard to find someone who conceals his benevolences and openly razes his dignity to the ground.

The blessed Elder Gabriel, "salos"* in Christ, was sowing the seeds of his brotherly love using his wits and God pleasing deeds, though sometimes his unexpected way of acting caused bewilderment. He intentionally masked his sagaciousness, neglected human's praise and

* "salos" – Greek feeble-minded, playing "Fool in Christ" to conceal divine wisdom and sanctity.

often, wandering along the streets as if affected by alcohol, condemned vehemently the infuriated mob that had crucified Jesus Christ and beheaded John the Forerunner.

Due to his strong belief in God all secrets of heart and mind of a man were revealed to him. Through intercession of the Holy Virgin, he cured invisibly soul and body and miraculously saved from ruin fellow-men befitted by evil spirit.

Such was God bearer by Grace Archimandrite Gabriel, Adam's descendant, persecuted for glorifying the Lord, our God.

Father Gabriel (the secular name Goderdzy Urgebadze) was born in Tbilisi on the 26th August, 1929 in the neighbourhood of Saint Barbara church. He lost his father when he was a small child. His mother later became a nun. He had a brother who died, his two sisters live in the same house near Saint Barbara church. He studied at a boys' school for six years. Those, who were in close relationship with Father Gabriel, called him by his father's name Vasiko.

The reminiscences of his neighbour Eugenia Kobelashvili relate to Father Gabriel's childhood, "Vasiko was a quiet child by nature, he used to sit quietly in a corner of the kindergarten room constructing a church from matches. It was his only entertainment. His teacher never gave him a word of reproach. It seemed strange that in those famine years, there were some week days when he did not even touch his milk porridge. Though his food was scarce enough, there were always leftovers on his plate."

Once little Vasiko witnessed a quarrel between two neighbours, one was blaming the other, "You'll be happy to crucify me like Christ!"

Curiosity aroused within Vasiko: why was Christ crucified? The boy was advised to go to church, but to his regret the church was closed. A church warden advised him to read the book about Jesus Christ. Vasiko started to collect money and with God's help got the books, from which he learnt about Jesus Christ.

His God blessed spirituality grew faster compared with his physical development, which was the reason why he chose the secluded life when still a child. He built a clay cell in his yard and stayed there. It was so small there was no room even for a mat. Since that time his ascetic combat starts. Vasiko's mother felt sorry for him and when he



The icons inside the church

as soon as Father Gabriel started glorifying God, he was diagnosed as mentally disordered and sent home under his mother's supervision.

Father Gabriel started building a church in his yard. He used to say, "For whom Church is not his Mother, God will never be his Father."

It was the time of troubles and persecutions when churches were destroyed and clericals executed. No construction of new churches was allowed. The officials used to come to destroy Father Gabriel's church. Though among them there were also the persons who having destroyed a part of the church, the next day secretly were giving money to restore the damaged part. Once a whole group of officials appeared before Father Gabriel. It was not difficult for him to guess the purpose of their visit. Giving no chance for them to announce their verdict, he said sharply: "I will not destroy the church, if you can, try ..." Being scared, the officials left hurriedly and in a while the workers came to fulfill their duties. Father Gabriel threatened them, "Remember, the one who gives orders will be punished more than the one who executes." The workers also were scared and left. This way the fear of God saved Father Gabriel's church from being demolished.

Father Gabriel's sister Julietta recalls: "Vasiko passionately expressed his grief in his chapel saying on his knees down, 'My Lord, how can I destroy the church dedicated to you!'"

The Nun Nino (Peikrishvili) also remembers, "Once I saw Father Gabriel knelt down before the icon of Saint Saviour, tears running down his face. He turned to me and said: "The destroyers of churches will strictly be punished."

As Father Gabriel's life was devoted to God since his childhood, he decided uncompromisingly to bind himself with church. He referred to Bishop Gabriel (Chachanidze) of Kutaisi with the following application, "You are requested to admit me to your Cathedral church as an attendant as it has been the purpose of my life since my childhood."

The request was gratified by Bishop. Father Gabriel was appointed a daily church warden and an attendant of the Holy Communion Table. Before, Father Gabriel had been serving for two years at the Zion Cathedral church of the Assumption as is evident from his "Meek request", "Since childhood I have had a firm decision to serve our Holy Mother Church. In this connection, I ask you humbly upon my



In the middle Saint George (Mcheidze), the Elder of Bethany Monastery, from left monk Vasily (Pirtschalava), from right monk Gabriel (Urgebadze), the spiritual children of St. George

to conduct services earnestly in accordance with the dignitary title, never belittle its merit or cause the embarrassment among the congregation by improper conduct.

"In Goderdzi Vassiliy Urgebadze's contrite confession no evidence is found to hinder him from being ordained a deacon"

The above statement approved by Nickolos Berikashvily, Kutaisi, January 30, 1955.

The same day Father Gabriel wrote an "oath list" and a "humble request":

I, Goderdzi Urgebadze being appealed to serve a clerical pay my vows and make solemn affirmation with appeal unto the Lord, Almighty, the Gospel and Life-Giving Cross – wish to pass services of God, The Holy Word of God according to church canons and give a pledge to perform Divine Liturgies strictly in accordance with the adopted church canons with no alterations, to defend teachings of holy fathers and Orthodox church on the basis of deep faith and convey them to the laity; protect the souls of the flock entrusted from the heresies and schism entrusted and avert from hostilities those averted into schisma and direct them towards the road of truth; deny myself by filling my life with renewed spirit and clear consciousness, avert worldly charms humbly with calmness and through God-pleasing deeds and enlighten fellow-men to seed goodness; neither personal benefits nor reverences but glorify God, strengthening the church and encouraging the neighbour.

Through intercession of the Most Holy Mother of God and All Saints may God, our Lord grant me Divine Grace. In support of a pledge I kiss the Gospel and the Holy Cross of our Saviour. Amen.

"Since my childhood, my cherished hope has been to serve God and lead a monastic life, that is why I ask you kindly to accept my humble request to be ordained with little schema and give me the name of Saint Gabriel the Athonite."

The request was gratified by Bishop Gabriel and addressed to Archimandrite George:

"Bestow a blessing on the schema, receive the deacon's confession and give him the name of the reverend Saint Gabriel the Athonite, according to his will".

Father Gabriel was tonsured the monastic schema and given the name Gabriel.

The following note signed by Secretary to the Georgian Patriarchate causes confusion: "Hieromonk Gabriel Urgebadze (a.k.a. Goderdzi Vassili) left his monastic life and returned to the laities in January 1956."

On Father Gabriel's application asking to relieve him from performing Divine Services the Bishop's inscription was made,

"... Though Father Gabriel showed obedience, unselfishness, devotion towards the obligations entrusted, to our regret, his chronic mental disease schizophrenia has been revealed while performing Divine Services, but since he found shelter at the Zion Cathedral church, his personal file is to be submitted to the Secretariat of the Catholicos."

At the same time, Father Gabriel's requests, "kindly release me from services"... "don't leave me in the street", "request kindly to appoint me hiermonk...", "allow me to continue monastic seclusion in Svetitskhoveli", etc. were mutually exclusive and do not rule out the possibility that the first statement was made under pressure.

In his letter Catholicos-Patriarch Melchisedek asks the Bishop of Kutaisi to forgive father Gabriel, who was dismissed from the Divine Services, as his fault was not so grave as to be put under interdict. The fact that the Patriarch asks forgiveness three times shows his warm attitude towards the hieromonk.

Neither Bishop Gabriel shows indifference towards the Elder which is clearly seen from his reply,

"Your Holiness, may Your kind, fatherly will be done. From today Goderdzi Urgebadze will participate in the Divine Services."

This all happened when infidels having seized the power outpoured all their wrath on the humanity. Driven by the devil, they were executing clericals to maintain their corrupted system. This period in the history of a church was the time of trouble and persecution.

A warden of the Bethany Monastery recalls the story heard from Archimandrite John (Maisuradze - ranked among the saints in 2002), "... We were at the Monastery of Bethany when people in military uniform ordered us to go to Mtskheta. They drove us to run. We understood we could expect nothing good from them. Suddenly we heard the sound of bullets discharging. We fell down. They thought we



Father Gabriel in his youth



Archimandrite Gabriel

were dead. Saving the bullets for another occasion, they left. But the Lord saved both of us, we survived and returned back to the church.

A few days later infidels rushed into the church and became furious seeing two candles lit. They shaved us with contemptuous mockery.

Though it was not a pleasant feeling, we were not in despair because we knew God abided in ordinary people's heart and we felt their hidden reverence. Godless were those enslaved by demons who happened to hold high positions.

Such was the period when quite an extraordinary event in Father Gabriel's life arose unbelievable confusion.

It was the 1st of May 1965, the holiday when communists celebrated the working class Solidarity. For the festive occasion, the façade of the Council of Ministers in Tbilisi was showed off by twelve meter high portrait of Lenin. Father Gabriel climbed upon the pedestal and set fire to it. Lenin's portrait burning in flames accompanied by noisy burst of bulbs surrounding the frame caused embarrassment. Father Gabriel was brought down and trampled so ruthlessly nobody could imagine he would survive. He was taken to hospital hardly breathing with eighteen fractures, broken jaw. Two weeks later he was arrested by KGB agents and accused of anti-Soviet propaganda.

Since Father Gabriel's personal file was destroyed, no details are available about his life in prison.

When interrogated, his response was: "I have done it because not worldly people, but the Crucifix is to be worshipped. Not "Glory to Lenin", but "Glory to You, our Lord, Jesus Christ!"

By a decision of the Supreme Court of Georgia Father Gabriel was sent to the hospital for mental diseases for expertise where he stayed for two months.

Noteworthy is the extract from Father Gabriel's medical chart, "... Diagnosis: psychopathic personality inclined to psychotic fits similar to schizophrenia. Keeps muttering something in a low voice as if talking to himself, believes in heavenly abode of God, angels. The main motive for his belief - everything is done through God's grace. He prefers to stay secluded; if referred to, reminds of God, angels, icons."

It is quite clear what was the reason for atheistic government of those dark years of persecution: to place a clerical and a mentally

disordered person on the same footing. But as the saying has it: "Every cloud has a silver lining", this verdict saved Father Gabriel from being executed within 24 hours. Of course, it was by Providence to save His precious vessel in order to lead his people towards the light.

Father Gabriel obeyed the commandments of Christian teaching with a remarkable zeal through his "salos" nature, led by his love for God and for neighbour.

Such was the God blessed life of the Elder who left his earthly life on November 2nd, 1995.

In his cell, the members of his family gathered from early morning, the kin and the nuns. The spiritual father of the Convent father Michael recalls, "We were at the Patriarchate, when we learnt Father Gabriel was dying, he suffered from terrible pain. His Holiness, the Patriarch blessed the Bishop Daniel to read prayers for "soul release." We moved hurriedly towards Mtskheta. We were forced to stop a car. To our relief, it was fixed within a few minutes. Everyone was under tension fearing we wouldn't find the Elder alive. Bishop Daniel assured us, "Father Gabriel is such a devoted servant of God that he will not leave us until the Bishop comes. To our joy, we found him alive. However, as soon as the Bishop finished Entreaty, Father Gabriel shedding his loving smile upon us, departed quietly for Eternal Motherland."

His Eminence Daniel and the Elder's doctor Zurab Varazashvili dressed him and he was placed at the Church of Transfiguration of Saint Nino's Convent of Samtavro.

The Heghumenos, Archimandrite Michael from whom Father Gabriel was partaking of Holy Communion, performed Supplication Services.

The nuns of the Convent being so much attached to the Elder could not imagine how to withstand such a loss. Suddenly, all of them witnessed a miracle: their hearts were filled with remarkable joy as if celebrating great feast, everyone felt it was through Father Gabriel's intercession.

The next day His Holiness and Beatitude, Patriarch of All Georgia Elias II performed the Memorial Service. At the funeral, according to his will, Father Gabriel was wrapped up in a mat and put gently into the grave. Nobody dared to drop the earth into the grave. It was decided to sieve earth around the edges and after a while, the earth started to



The grave dug out by Father Gabriel in his church where he reposed from time to time to keep constant remembrance of death



Incorrupt blood of monk Gabriel



According to his will, Father Gabriel was buried wrapped up in mat



Father Gabriel's tomb in the yard of Samtavro Convent

spread slowly over the mat and when the mat disappeared from sight, the earth started flowing loosely filling the grave with the same tenderness as Father Gabriel cherished his beloved Motherland.

Gracefully and fondly Archimandrite Gabriel's soul approached the Almighty, while his body was tenderly taken by the earth. This way the hard world was departed by "salos", the long-suffering, devoted and injured servant of God full of deep love for God and the neighbour who often denounced but never condemned.

And for his extraordinary love and deep faith, God has endowed him with the healing power after his repose as well. That is why there is a continuous flow of people at his grave witnessing his miracles, healing power from his lamp oil and taking with them the blessing from the place where in the 4th century A.D. Equal-to-the-Apostles Saint Nino at the age of fourteen found her abode and was practicing ascetic feats.

A blackthorn bush in the yard of the Convent which bears the traces of Divine Grace left by Saint Nino, the Enlightener of Georgia was the bestowed place of Father Gabriel. Many foreigners pay homage to the burial place of the Elder and express their reverence by hymns chanted in Georgian.



Reminiscences

Metropolitan Daniel (Datuashvili), Georgia: I became closer to father Gabriel when serving at the Convent of Samtavro. After His Holiness and Beatitude Catholicos Patriarch of all Georgia Elias II, Father Gabriel for me is the second person reverend. He was a real ascetic endowed by spiritual gifts, possessing boundless love, who was revered not only by Georgians but by the foreigners who had ever been in contact with him.

Metropolitan Sergius (Chekurishvili), Georgia: So many miracles after his repose is a sign of great holiness.

Archbishop Thaddaeus (Ioramashvili), Georgia: Father Gabriel was a miracle worker sent by God to horrible, tough world, devoid of love.

Archimandrite Timothy, Hegumenos of the Oropos Monastery of the Holy Spirit, Greece: We are happy even within the last time there are holy fathers having impartial will to serve people. Canonization of Father Gabriel is a zealous matter.

Schearchimandrite Vitaliy (Sidorenko), Saint Alexander Nevsky church, Tbilisi: Elder Gabriel is a genuine Elder.

Heghumenos Philaret (Gudinov), Saint John the Theologos church, Tbilisi: Father Gabriel is an extraordinary monk gifted with miracle-working, a fearless confessor of truth.

Heghumenos Eliseos (Belkania), Georgia: 20th century doesn't witness greater Elder than Archimandrite Gabriel.

Archimandrite Ephrem, Russia: Monk Gabriel in his nation's life was a great prophet with a special mission, gifted by Divine Grace, through his intercession spiritual mysteries of the last period will be revealed to Georgian people.

Heghumenos Steleanos, Xeropotamou Monastery, Holy Mount of Athos: Such a great monk even hardly to be found among us.

Heghumenos Simeon (Abramishvili), Monastery of Saint Elias the Righteous: Father Gabriel united all monks together within himself, carried everybody's love and multiplied it.

Archpriest Pavel Kosach, Saint John the Theologos church, Tbilisi: Father Gabriel was an authentic Elder carrying meekly all his life the cross of persecutions and was rewarded by merciful God.

Monk Tikhon Bogoliuboff, Russia: Archimandrite Gabriel was one of the marvellous representatives of the monasticism in Georgia, the blessed "salos" who under the hardest period of the last time could prolong with dignity the unceasing chain of Georgian saints.

Heghumenos Georgia, the Convent of Saint John the Baptist, Jerusalem: You are in Paradise, you have a genuine Elder!

Romanoz Samsonoff, Russia: For multiple Godless decades father Gabriel remained a steadfast pillar of veritable faith.

Nikolaos Venalousoff, Russia: "Salos" feats of Father Gabriel could have roused envy in such a country rich in its own "salos" traditions as Orthodox Russia.

Oleg – Trokha, Russia (The most remarkable beggar called Oleg – Trokha, who asked alms at Saint John the Forerunner's Church in Saint Petersburg and who was known as a God blessed miracle-maker): Gabriel of Georgia is such Godly man as Andrew the "Salos."

Giuli Chokhonelidze, movie director, Tbilisi: Clerical hierarchy from Archbishops to lower ranks used to come to Father Gabriel for blessings. They all admitted he was close to God and the direct conductor

of the Word of God. He was fearless preacher of truth bearing the "salos" feat.

Gia Kobachishvili, Tbilisi: We lived in the neighbourhood of Father Gabriel. He often took us, the small boys, to the church of Saint Barbara, gave us small crosses and made us circle around the church. Once he stopped with remarkable expression in his eyes, looked into my eyes and said: 'Always remember - there is God!' No sooner has he finished the last word as he fell down hitting his head and waving his hands as if in agony. Despite such a conduct, I realized he was in sober mind. With his words addressed to me with belief he implanted for ever love for God in my soul. High rank infidels of those Godless years were persecuting Father Gabriel all his life. So many times his heart was wounded but he neither bore any malice, nor complain against those who treated him so ruthlessly when he had burnt Lenin's portrait.

Valeria Alfeeff, a researcher from Moscow arrived in Tbilisi in 1990 to have benefit from his talk as she heard about his spiritual merits. She met Father Gabriel, got some information about his life and published a book "The Called, Devout, Chosen." In her book, she gives a detailed description of Father Gabriel's labours. The author ranks him among the "Chosen."

The members of the American church of Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood visited Georgia in order to meet Father Gabriel. Hieromonk Gerasim recalls: In November, 1991 we had a possibility to meet Father Gabriel at Saint Nino's Convent of Samtavro in the old capital of Georgia – Mtskheta.

Having taken the blessing from the Heghumene Ketevan, we made for Father Gabriel's cell. We found him standing at his door burning papers. Father Gabriel blessed us and led us inside his modest abode, which was a real miracle. The round room with dome-like ceiling was 5 yards in diameter; the walls were made of bricks. Some of the windows were sealed and the light penetrating into the cell created typically monastic surrounding. Brick walls were almost completely covered with icons of various sizes, shapes and styles.

During our pilgrimage we were convinced many times that he was a "salos".

Archimandrite Gabriel is a contemporary hero of Georgia among the clericals, enlisted in Georgian church chronicles as spiritual father, the Elder and a legend of contemporary times who endured torments for Christ with patience and remained alive to testify truth, not betraying the Georgian church in the hardest period of its persecution.

The magazine was issued by Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood in the USA with Father Gabriel's photo on its front cover page with an inscription: "Confessor of Christ in present day Georgia."



Metropolitan Isaiah (Chanturia)

Beloved Father Gabriel...

I came to faith after I was Christened as a student. We celebrated my first Easter at the Convent of Samtavro, where I met Father Gabriel who looked strange to me and who had some peculiar head cover on his head. I knew he lived in a hen-house. As if by chance, I passed by the bell-tower near his small cell. The Elder noticed me, motioned me in, filled the glass with red wine and said: "You have to drink it, we are celebrating Easter today. God has forgiven all our sins, now we can drink a little and rejoice. Who is thinking about sin today is worse than Judas."

He frightened me with his words and I drank full glass in honourable obedience. My spiritual father David, who was also the Convent's spiritual father (later Bishop Daniel), offered me his cell to have some rest to withstand easier the All-Night service. Such an attention to me was a high honour. I relaxed in silence and heard his small children Giga and Maiko fluttered inside the hall. My heart was filled with joy.

When it became dark, the youth gathered in front of Father Gabriel's cell. The Elder was sitting in a shading place under the walnut trees on a small wooden ladder with his funny head cover on. We settled around him. Against the dark background, Father Gabriel's beard looked white. He was talking about angels, the Heavenly Kingdom. We felt as if we were elevated above the earth. Many of those who were listening to his talk under the walnut trees have chosen either monk's hermit or nun's secluded life.

A lot of people gathered for the All-Night Vigils at Samtavro Convent. There were also believers from Tbilisi. After the Divine Liturgy a loud call of Father David "Jesus Christ has risen" was followed by unisonous respond of the congregation "Truly has risen." The Elder asked father David to give him a chance to say a word. Father Gabriel greeted the congregation from amvon, his speech was accompanied by impressive gestures, by raising his hands to one and the other side. In his preach he mentioned some movie stars, including Georgian producer Rezo



Chkheidze. All of a sudden lifting his hands and raising his eyes up, he slipped off the amvon and collapsed. I remember some of the guests from Tbilisi expressed indignation. As for me, I rejoiced at it. Christ has arisen! As Father Gabriel has it, God has forgiven all our sins and now there is time for joy and fun.

The Vigils was followed by the Sunday meal. Young members of the congregation were sitting next to Father David and the Elder. Toasts were proposed. Father Gabriel spoke about the Holy Virgin's passions, about the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of the Saviour ... Unexpectedly he started crying, in a while his eyes were filled with joy. His narration was so vivid and expressive that when he cried we cried with him, when he laughed, we laughed with him. I have never experienced anything like that. Indeed, it was really unforgettable celebration of Easter.

Winter came and for Sunday Services we moved from the Main Cathedral to a small church of Archangel Michael that was heated by a stove. The congregation was participating in the Divine Liturgy together with nuns. We became attached to Father Gabriel and got used to take his blessings with a bow, kneeled down, kissing his hand. Among us there was a feeble-minded woman from Mtskheta, who kept talking about her geese – she had them, she lost them and then found them, it was an endless story. Being an organic part of the congregation she was introducing some cheerfulness in our life. In our warm, crammed church in the middle of Vespers, Father Gabriel opened the door. Forcing his way ahead he was giving his blessings to the nuns and laity. Then he stopped and said to a woman, "When you kneel down someone may think you worship me, while you take blessing from Jesus Christ, so you kneel down before Him." And Father Gabriel himself knelt down. Then he looked at the nun who was reading prayers and asked, "What are you mumbling here!?" He continued his blessings turning to the right and to the left. When he noticed our feeble-minded member, his heart was filled with joy, he hugged her with special devotion, looked into her eyes and asked, "How are you?" She said: "Not bad." "How are your geese?" You should have seen how she suffered the story of the lost and found geese. They looked so sweet together.

The same year it was a Sunday Service during fasting period, when Father Gabriel entered the church crying out loudly. I was really frightened thinking there must be the end to the world. In his screaming sounds I could distinguish the words, "The cats have stolen my sausage!" I could not help smiling. We, the novices were trying to follow fasting strictly and at the peak of fasting period Father Gabriel was wailing over his lost sausage! Nevertheless his words did not change my decision to observe fasting rules. I understood better "It is not what goes into a person's mouth that makes him ritually unclean; rather what comes out of it makes him unclean."

Usually everyone was taking blessing from Father Gabriel by kneeling down and kissing his hand. Two sisters Nata and Manana retold me the following story. Once they met him in town and were very happy. Since the place was muddy due to rain, they decided to take his blessing by making a small bow. When they did so, to their surprise, the Elder knelt down in the mud, so they had to follow his example. He blessed them in the mud, winked and said: "Score 1:0!"

Sometimes Father Gabriel might have appeared to someone strange because of his unexpected actions, but when he looked completely exhausted he was emitting peace and calmness, in other cases – deep love...



Archbishop Seraphim (Jojua)

From the first sight as I met father Gabriel I understood he was an extraordinary person. He possessed God-blessed gift of sagaciousness, he could read thoughts. His smile, his tears were filled with love for God. Once he put me a rather delicate question. My sincere answer made him happy, he said he loved simple monks. There is no doubt he was a great ascetic. In his words, glance, behaviour, deliberately artistic movements of hands I felt he was chosen by God. Such fervent love for God, his people, his Motherland could have abided only in God's chosen vessel. Out of ten "salos", probably, nine are in the state of delusion, one is chosen by God. And this one was Father Gabriel.

I am grateful to the Lord for making me worthy of tonsuring in the Elder's mantle. When Father Gabriel learnt before my tonsuring that I had no cloak, he brought his own mantle to me.

Father Gabriel was revered by many people. He was deeply venerated by great ascetic father Vitaliy (Sidorenko) who came from the Glinskaya Pustinia Monastery first to Sukhumi and then was also leading his "salos" feats in Tbilisi. One day he visited Father Gabriel and after long talk they exchanged their pectoral crosses.

Should Father Gabriel be alive, I would have referred to him with more veneration and more often.

Through the prayers of God blessed father Gabriel, may God forgive all our sins.

Heghumenos Tornike (Moseshvili), Motsameta Monastery of Saints David and Konstantine, Kutaisi

Monk Gabriel was a strong vigorous person, very humble, God-fearing, a brave warrior of forceful spiritual combat.

During the 86 years period of my life I've experienced lots of sorrow and happiness. One of the happiest moments I experienced was when visiting San-Francisco Orthodox Monastery, in the church magazine I read about vigorous feats of our monks from Bethany Father John

(Maisuradze) and Father George (Mkheidze). As for Father Gabriel it was written: "In Georgia they have no idea what a great Elder they have." Should centuries pass for him to be renowned?

Heghumenos Michael (Gabrighidze), Shiomgvime Monastery

I was a newly tonsured monk and had a great desire to get spiritual benefit from such an experienced Elder as monk Gabriel was. He did not feel well and he was lying in his cell. It was the state when he did not show off his "salos" feats. His teaching was serious, entering and captivating the soul. He was saying, "Love should rule over all canons." He turned to the nuns asking to lay the table and bring "Professor" (a bottle of red wine). He passed me a glass and blessed me to drink it "do dna" (in Russian bottoms up). I obeyed the blessing. He didn't offer me more. When the nuns left, he said, "They think I'm not feeling well. Actually nobody is happier than me, the more pain I feel the closer I approach God." Here Father Gabriel broke off for a moment and started weeping. "How weak is my faith", he continued, "I've taken a pill to relieve my stomach pain, but what can a tiny pill do if the Almighty admitted me to be put under a trial?"

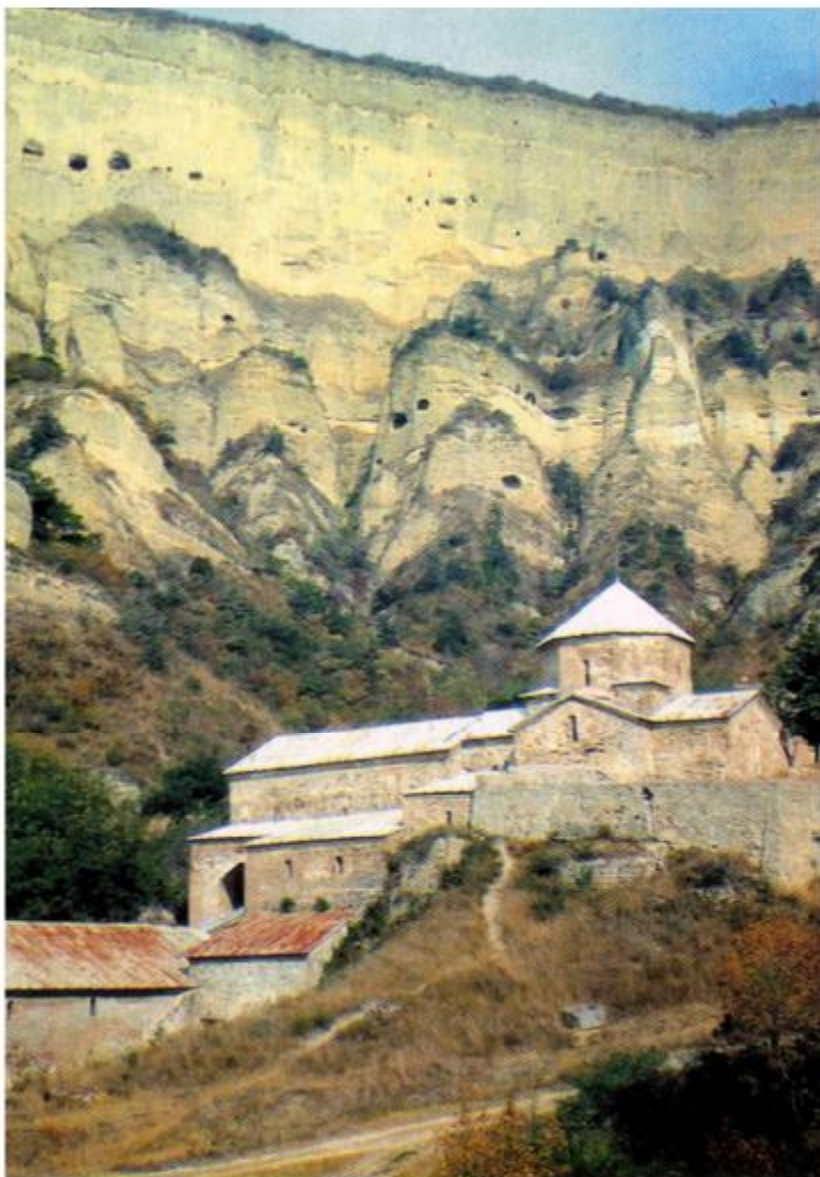
We were engaged in such a talk when two old ladies pronounced the Jesus prayer at the door. They were blessed by the Elder to come in. They said they brought some home-made patties to Father Gabriel, as they heard he had been ill.

Here Father Gabriel's nature as a monk yielded to the "salos" one. "Who told you I'm ill, I'd just lain down to relax, to straighten out my shoulders".

One of the ladies didn't know the Elder. She asked him "to lend his hand." Father Gabriel looked at me with a smile, "Why does she need my hand now ?!" he asked. The lady took his hand muttering some spell to herself. All of a sudden with vehement, booming voice he forced away her hand giving out a hollow roar, "How dare you touch me, a monk? Trying to seduce me? Get out, now, both of you and don't forget



Revelation of the Holy Virgin and John the Baptist to St. Shio



Monastery of St. Shio of Mgvime. 6th century

to take your patties with you!" The ladies were scared to death, they didn't know what to do. Both of them fell down on their knees, asking for forgiveness. The Elder was repeating sternly, "Put your patties back and out, don't make me get up!" One of the women, who seemed to know the Elder was asking him to keep at least the patties made with their own hands. But in vain. He stayed adamant. Careless and sluggish attitude caused such a confusion. As soon as the women left, the Elder started praying for them with such ardent love that I was amazed. By raising hands to heaven he blessed them, their families. "Their visit to a monk was not revered, but they will learn now how to behave with clergies", he said with a smile.

Sometimes it took Father Gabriel one hour to cover the distance from Samtavro Convent to Svetitschoveli Cathedral Church, which is only 200 m away. He would bless everyone on his way, talk with them pretending he had some problems with his legs. Sometimes he was flying as swiftly as carried by wind and I could hardly catch up with him.

Once Father Gabriel appeared in Zion Cathedral, when a Bishop was performing Supplication Service to Queen Tamar. A flood of radiance filled the temple. Standing next to Bishop, Father Gabriel took a quick look over the flock. Having seen no particular veneration towards the Saint entreated he ascended the altar stairs and pronounced loudly to everyone's bewilderment: "Kneel down! Do you realize what you are doing and why you are standing here? Are you entreating in front of the great Saint? How? With such an indifference?"

The flock immediately knelt down together with Father Gabriel who continued with tears, "When Georgia's fate was put to test, she spent sleepless nights in her ardent prayers entreating the Lord, the Holy Virgin to save her Motherland, and bare foot, with Cross in her hand she was leading the troops towards the battle field and they always return victorious. And you, the ungrateful ones, do not want even to kneel down?" His wailing was heard long after. At closing of the Entreaty he rose to his feet and bowing with veneration kissed the holy icon of Saint Tamar. In dead silence, the flock followed his example. Each of us felt what a profound respect and awe we should possess in performing Supplication Services and when entreating our beloved Saint

and revered Queen Tamar. The Supplication Service was followed by holy ointment. This episode has changed my life and I have chosen the monastic path.

At Great Lent on Holy Thursday after the Lord's Supper Service at Svetitskhoveli Cathedral, we went to the Convent for meals. Passing by Father Gabriel's tower, we heard wailing. When we asked what it was, the nuns said Father Gabriel wept every day during the Holy Week of Passions. In his contrition to God, he was asking for forgiveness for each of us. I thought to myself if I could ever have such faith and reach such spiritual height.

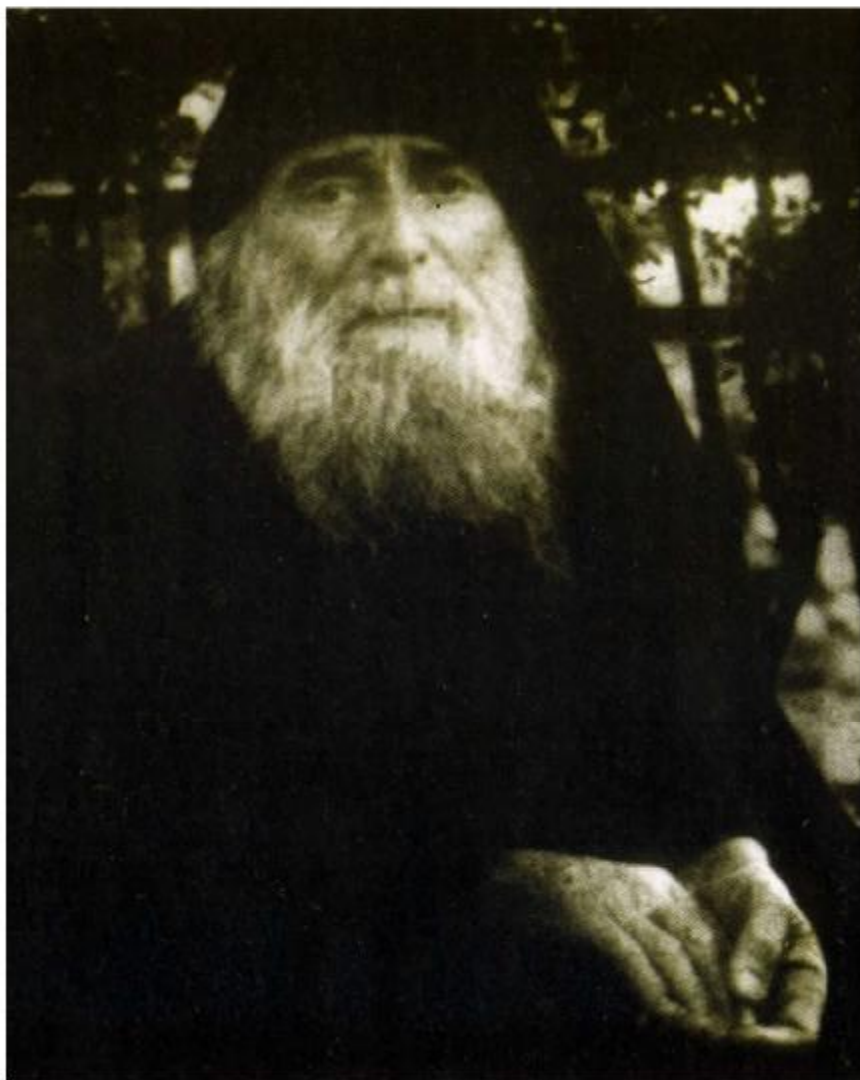
Once with my friends we participated in the Divine Liturgy in Svetitskhoveli. After the Service, we were invited by His Eminence Daniel to have meals at Samtavro Convent. After the meals we were blessed to leave for Tbilisi. As we went out, we heard Father Gabriel's voice from his tower asking us, "Where are you going? Don't you need my blessing?" We directed our steps toward his tower with pleasure. He let us in and said, "To come to Mtscheta was your will, but to leave it is my will. Now I will host you as I am used to." We had just had meals and could not imagine how to swallow even a lump. "I don't know what you have eaten, now you have to join me", he said and blessed the nuns to bring whatever was available and added, "Don't forget to bring "Professor." By his blessing we were eating, drinking so much, we enjoyed his humour, his chants, his graceful gestures. It was a real feast. We were returning home with Divine Grace cherished within ourselves.

The night prior to our tonsure we shared common joy with my spiritual brothers. Father Gabriel noticed our excessive excitement, carelessness and called us, "Hey, bandits, what are you doing over there, have you already considered yourselves real monks?" After a while he hugged us devotedly: "I love you, my children, you will have many difficulties and grieves on your path." His eyes were filled with tears. Only God knows what he perceived through his gift for discerning spirits and foresee events.

One member of our congregation gave me Father Gabriel's photo, which I put inside the Gospel. In 1997 The Georgian Orthodox Church was put to trial. His Holiness and Beatitude Elias II, the Patriarch of



Archimandrite Gabriel



Archimandrite Gabriel

All Georgia gave us, the clericals, the blessing to read every day two chapters from the Holy Testament. My choice fell on chapters 23 and 24 of the Apostle. I opened the Gospel at those chapters and found Father Gabriel's photo. I have no doubt father Gabriel was raising his prayers together with us.

Father Gabriel underwent so many insults, sufferings, tortures during his life but his heart always was full of boundless love towards God, the neighbour. He was an example of humbleness and tolerance for the whole nation.



He kept saying "God is Love".



**Heghუმენე Ketevan (Kopaliani),
Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino**

*"For what seems to be God's foolishness
is wiser than human wisdom"*

(Corinthians 1: 25)

"Christian church resembles a vessel, whose master is Jesus Christ, while the mast is His Cross, the Redeemer. Who knows how many times this spiritual vessel has been violently disturbed by roaring waves of heresy! How many times the Orthodox Church found herself under rough waves threatened by wreckage and always went out unharmed thanks to the Heavenly Master. Blessed are those who do not abandon this ship, they will inevitably reach a calm harbour of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Paterikon).



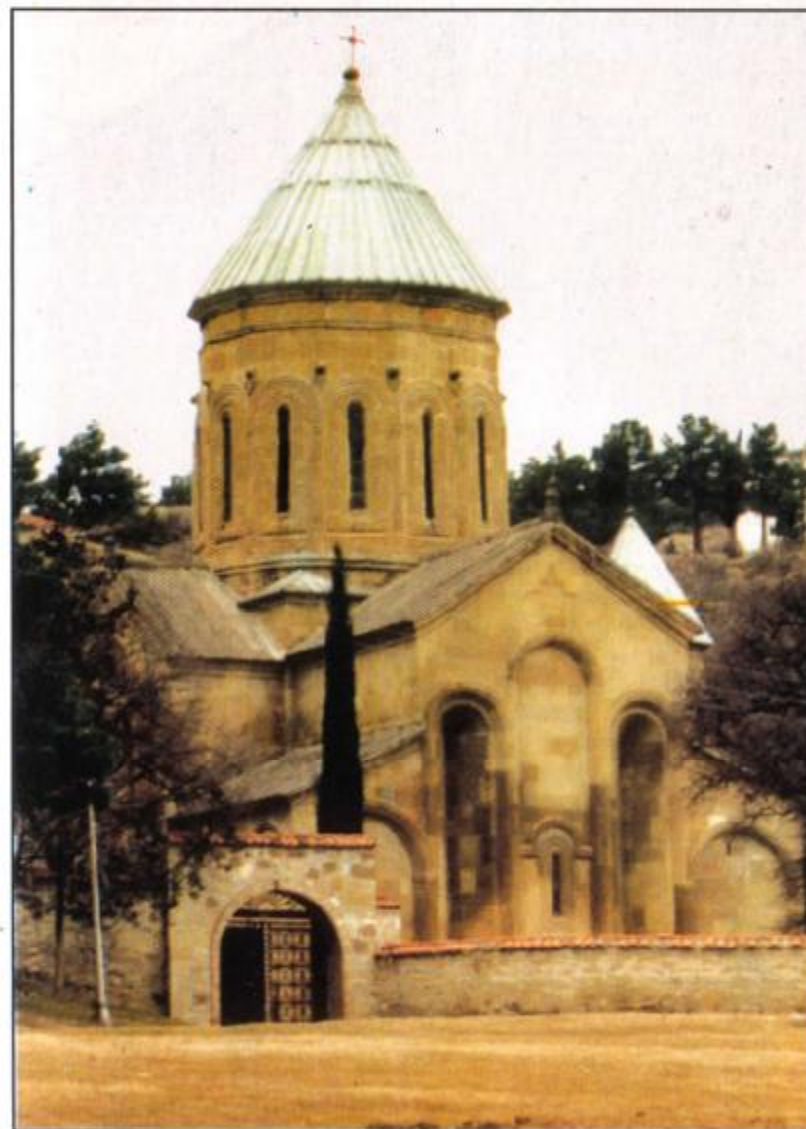
One of the most vigorous passengers of the Divine Vessel, who strived for the invisible Heavenly Kingdom through his devoted faith was our spiritual father Archimandrite Gabriel.

Most of our people still remember a "salos" Elder walking along the streets in his hood, sometimes bare foot with a golden diadem on his head.

For the first time I saw Father Gabriel in Rustaveli Avenue 20 years ago. He was proclaiming loudly: "Georgians! Wake up, come to your senses! What is happening with Georgia, come and have a look at Saint Shushanik's grave! What theatre has to do with Metekhi church!"

By weeping bitterly and groaning, the "salos" Elder was expressing his grief and sorrow over the people and the church. Some people would stop and listen to him with sympathy, some would pass by with a skeptic smile. After this incident, I went to Metekhi Church and found theatrical articles piled up on the Saint's grave.

A certain time passed; through Divine Grace and hard labours of His Holiness Elias II, Divine Liturgies were revived in many churches and the graves of Saints were adorned with veneration.



The Church of Transfiguration of Samtavro Convent



Samtavro Convent of St. Nino, the cells and interior

I met the remarkable Elder for the second time at the Zion Cathedral. Upon completion of the Divine Service, Father Gabriel was blessing the flock: some in the name of God's Divine Grace, others through intercession of the Holy Virgin, or Saint Nino. When I approached him vehemently for blessing, he said: "May God, the Lord bless you, my child. You will be the Mother of Georgia." I felt confused taking it as an exaggerated and not a serious statement, because it is Saint Nino who is considered as the Mother of Georgia and I also called the Mother of Georgia the statue on Narikala fortress (holding a cup of wine for guests in one hand and a sword for enemies in the other).

Time passed and by God's will I was tonsured. A few years after the Patriarch was to consecrate the Heghumene of Saint Nino Convent. I was afraid that this heavy cross will be put on my shoulders and I revealed my fear to Father Gabriel. The Elder calmed me down saying: "Don't be afraid, my Sister, Divine Grace is on you, don't reject the Patriarch's blessing, since it is the God's will. To be a Heghumene doesn't mean to bear a title, it involves humiliation, mortification of self-esteem and pride. To some it is given for salvation, to others for ruin. If a Heghumene follows the path of God with humbleness, she is on her way to salvation."

From Samtavro Convent we set off for a mantle to Sche-Archimandrite Vitaliy (Sidorenko) and ScheHeghumene Seraphima (Diachenko). They welcomed us heartily. After making me a low bow at the entrance, Father Vitaliy settled down on the floor. For me it seemed rather strange. I thought he might be "salos" too. When ScheHegumene Seraphima brought mantles, Father Vitaliy jumped to his feet, took the mantle from her hands and put the cloak round me. He gave me the icon "The Holy Virgin Heghumene Terra et Coeli" (The Heghumene of Earth and Heaven) whose copy has been made by nun Nana (Kutateladze). The icon has been placed in my cell. For our Convent father Vitaliy gifted an icon of Stephen the First Christian martyr and gave us blessing to carry the icon daily in processional chants around the church, which we have been performing since then.

Father Gabriel and father Vitaliy felt comfortably in each other's company. God's Grace abode in both of them. As a sign of understanding they interchanged their pectoral crosses (ScheArchimandrite Vitaliy is

buried in the courtyard of Saint Alexander Nevsky church in Tbilisi; ScheHeghumene Seraphima has found her eternal rest in Samtavro Convent's graveyard).

On July 13, 1991, on the feast day of Twelve Apostles, I was consecrated as the Heghumene of Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino. I was given a Crosier and richly adorned Cross.

(The Elder's prophesy came true: Saint Nino Convent is regarded as the Mother of all Convents in Georgia and its Heghumene is the Mother of Georgia – author).

Father Gabriel was distinguished by a gift of exceptional tolerance. In each person with no distinction, he saw the image and likeness of God. He shared the feelings and felt compassion for his fellow-man's sufferings. He was so humble that he considered himself to be the last sinner. He exhorted us to be meek, humble. He used to say: "Any kind of sin in God's sight is a small sea pebble, no sin can be superior than God's mercy." He strictly forbid us to condemn a neighbour: "Should you see a killer, the one caught in adultery or a drunkard lying on the road, never blame the one who is God's creation."

Usually the Elder was testing people for humility by kneeling them down, denouncing, attacking indignantly or edifying them through Divine Wisdom. Once Father Gabriel locked the door after the meals and didn't allow the nuns to go out. It was before my tonsure. He ordered me to fetch a bowl and have the hands of all nuns washed. When I returned to him with a bowl full of dirty water, he looked at me searchingly and said: "Drink the water to the last drop. "The whole bowl?" I was surprised. "Yes, "do dna!" I drank it without saying a word as considered it indisputable. The Elder clasped me affectionately within his arms and blessed me heartily.

Once very excited due to disobedience of our nuns, I came up to him complaining: "Father Gabriel, I can't stand it any more. I have to remove my Cross." He cast distressed look at me, turned towards the icons as he usually did with raised hands and then said to me: "Be patient my Sister and Mother, don't remove your Cross, the one who does it will take responsibility for it. Do you think the Patriarch's life is easy? Do you know how heavy the Catholicos Cross is? He carries two Crosses – one for the laity and the other for the church. Many



Father Gabriel's Diadem

At one of His Holiness Elias II's visits to Samtavro Convent, father Gabriel appeared from his tower with a royal diadem on his head. After making bows and benedictions, the Patriarch asked Father Gabriel if the diadem was made of gold. "No, Your Holiness", answered Father Gabriel. "Should it be golden I would have been beheaded." Both looked at each other with brotherly love. The Patriarch's words concealed the mystery known only to God



The crown of thorns
made by Father Gabriel

**“Sometimes I put
this wreath on my
head and when
spikes pierce my
head, I feel how
our Saviour
suffered”**



temptations are awaiting you. You will be thrown by God into burning furnace to be tested and purified.”

I was not satisfied by his advise and went out to the Patriarch, my first spiritual father. Our Patriarch's and Father Gabriel's thoughts often coincided. His Beatitude received me with a loving smile. When I rebuked him why he had put on me such a heavy Cross he said sternly: “Not me but God has put this Cross on you. The further you move from it the heavier it will become. Bend your head, show your love to people, you must be like grass to be trampled down. God gives relief to those who is in need. Saint Nino will strengthen you to hold up.” He made a sign of the Cross and blessed me.

Whenever any difficulties arose in our monastic life, I always referred to Father Gabriel for advise. Once I said to him: “The nuns refuse to accept remarks or reproaches from me. Is it better to let them do whatever they want?” Pondering for a while, he said sharply: “You are an Heghumene, my Sister and Mother, aren't you? You are carrying the Cross of Archimandrite. You will be punished by God if you neglect what is to be revealed. Denouncement and censure are different things. How can you close your eyes to something that is to be remedied. You have to point out, give orders, if they do not obey, God will be the judge.”

Father Gabriel had special veneration towards sacred items. He was seeking and he was finding. His favorite pursuit was to clean icons, put them in frames, clean candle holders. He often cleaned the Sanctuary. Once he found a relic fragment of the Life-Giving Pillar in the niche of King Mirian and Queen Nana. “When I touched it for the first time, I was thrown back by invisible power”, he said. Metropolitan Daniel and the Elder have venerably placed this sanctity at Samtavro church where it has been enshrined till today.

One day it was decided to change the icons of the iconostasis. Father Gabriel flatly objected. Soon the icons started emitting sweet fragrance. The myrrh was gushing from them for about a month.

Metropolitan Daniel was discussing the problems of monastic life with nuns. Father Gabriel ascending the stairs heard one nun's complaints against the Heghumene. He approached the nun and threateningly raised his voice: “How dare you keep chatting about

Heghumene! Do you know who you are?" Then he turned to His Eminence, saying: "Forgive this one and take care after the other one" and descended the stairs. Later Metropolitan Daniel remarked with amazement: "I wanted to say something quite different but Father Gabriel changed all my thoughts, for the Lord Himself spoke through his words."

One day the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral Church was visited by a group of foreigners. Father Gabriel was standing at the Holy Pillar that enshrines the Holy Robe of our Lord Jesus Christ. He kept his eye on the guests and having noticed indifference, he started shouting: "Do you have any idea where you are? Do you think you glorify the Almighty with your hands placed behind your backs?!" He was swinging back his crook threateningly. Though the guide did not translate the Elder's words, the foreigners understood by his expressive gestures the reason of his indignation.

Once when some lay fellows approached him for blessing, he asked: "Why do you come to me?"

"We miss you", they answered.

"What does it mean you miss me, am I Nato Vachnadze? (the Georgian movie star). You should come to me when you need spiritual benefit."

During fratricidal war in Georgia, an armed group of forty men visited Samtavro Convent. Father Gabriel blessed them with love, made them leave their arms outside, led them inside the church and after saying the Lord's prayer kneeled down distributed crosses to them. Then Father Gabriel ascended the amvon and preached the sermon of brotherly love and love for God and he asked:

"What direction are you setting off, my sons?"

"To Zugdidi, to wage war" they said.

"And whom are you going to wage war with, my brothers, they are Georgians, aren't they?" Father Gabriel raised his hands and shouted:

"Shoot me! I am Georgia!" Then he took his crook and swinging it back cried out: "I will break your heads with this stick, you worthless cowards, you have to wear lechaki (a woman's head wear), not caps!"

The "noble knights" rushed out of the church in such a haste, that almost forgot to take their arms.

Father Gabriel had special veneration towards Samtavro miracle-working icon of the Iberian Holy Virgin (Portaitissa). He was entreating Her – the Queen of Heaven and Earth, glorifying Her with his beautiful capturous chant "Axion estin..." (It is meet indeed to worship Thee...)

The Iberian icon of the Holy Virgin was donated by the Monastery of Holy Mount of Athos in 1912. As the inscription has it, the donation of the icon to Samtavro Convent was related with Bishop Paul (Japaridze) whom the Patriarch Kalistrat (Tsintsadze) called: "chaste in body and soul, immaculate, who brought the laity to church ... having devoted love towards his beloved Motherland."

The burial place of the Bishop is the Samtavro graveyard.

Father Gabriel's main concern was to edify nuns, purify their souls and show the way of ascending the spiritual ladder. He wrote the rules for them, put it in a frame and hung it on the wall, titled:

The Narrow Path of Monasticism:

- *Suppress gluttony*
- *Never miss All-Night Vigils and chanting*
- *Drink water moderately*
- *Restrict bread*
- *Sustain bashfulness and reproach*
- *Tolerate accusations and condemn*
- *Mortify passions, cut off will*
- *Endure insult meekly*
- *Endure hardships*
- *Sustain abusing words*
- *Bear visible adulterer*
- *Take offense with no anger, if repented, forgive immediately, if backbitten, take it with regret and patience*
- *Forgive and don't seek revenge*
- *If blamed, accept humbly without arguments*

Father Gabriel's thoughts were constantly with God. Whenever he saw someone saying prayers promptly he started mimicking: Tra-ta-ta, ra-ta-ta. What is it? Are you saying prayers or reading a newspaper?! It sounds like shooting with Chapaev's machine gun. Say prayers with fear and veneration! Think for a moment in front of whom you are standing. Whom are you talking to? Jesus Christ is always invisibly present, He is among us."

Once Heghumene Georgia from the Convent of John the Baptist, Jerusalem, visited Samtavro Convent. I knew her from the Convent of Piukhtitsk. She wanted to see Father Gabriel and stayed quite a long time with the Elder. When leaving his cell with her eyes filled with tears and joy, she said: "You have a genuine "starets" (Elder), you are in Paradise."

Indeed, Father Gabriel was a true Christian, wise spiritual guide, for us he was a great hope. He was gifted by Divine Grace to cure body and soul.

One day nun Nino was bitten by a snake in the courtyard of the Convent and the nuns frightened ran to Father Gabriel asking for help. The Elder applied oil, sprinkled holy water to two deep wounds on her leg and they were cured immediately. To conceal from nuns his curative gift, he said strictly: "Now, go quickly to a doctor!" It was a very difficult period in Georgia: famine, no electricity, no medicine, no bandages, nothing. The doctors helplessly shrugged their shoulders awaiting pitiful outcome. But the nun Nino recovered soon, while Father Gabriel in his cell commended his fervent thanks-giving prayers to God.

The Elder never accepted any kind of praise from a layman. As soon as there was such an attempt, his "salos" feats made them lapse dump. Whenever someone referred to him for spiritual benefit, Father Gabriel showed evangelistic wisdom. Once I inquired after his health with deliberate reverence. He cast his searching look at me and said: "How can I be, Sister and Mother, I eat and drink, drink and eat, such abundant food and drinks would have made even Pharaohs envious. I don't know what to do with all this stuff, please, help yourself."

There was always food on the Elder's table but I never saw him eat anything. Only God knows this mystery. If there was any need to



Icons in Father Gabriel's cell



Icons in Father Gabriel's cell

strengthen someone's faith, Father Gabriel would start telling miracles he experienced.

One day we visited the church built by Father Gabriel. He told us the following story. "It was raining, the roof was leaking. I was in grief. What will happen to all these icons? I needed several cubic meters of timber to fix the roof. No means available. I was entreating God for help. All of a sudden a man arose in front of me who appeared to be an engineer. He looked at the icons and said: "I was in a hurry to go to a certain place but some invisible power brought me here. Why? I don't know. Then he added: You know, this icon is now telling me to bring here one cubic meter of timber. He pointed to a big icon of Saint Saviour I was entreating to. Amazed by the miracle, the man promised to bring me the timber and he did."

Father Gabriel considered Jehovah witnesses and other heretics as the Satan followers. He called them visible demons. He advised us never dispute with them as it is written in the Gospel: "Do not give what is sacred to the dogs; do not cast your pearls before swine. If you do it, they trample them under their feet, and then turn and tear you into pieces" (Matthew 7:6).

When the Elder became sick, nun Paraskeva was in obedience to look after him. He took it with humbleness and nun Paraskeva never left him, remained faithful till his last breath.

Once professor Bochorishvili with his family visited the Convent. The Elder was reclined in lounge near the tower. The guests greeted the Elder venerably and offered medical assistance to which Father Gabriel objected sharply saying: "Sorry, I'm a monk. I'm not in a position to do whatever I want with my body. The first healer is God, next is a doctor." The talk grew into controversial discussion. To relieve the tension, I said that the Elder had his own oddities. The professor's son George laughed and admitted that his father had the same traits. He said: "Let them argue, they will understand each other."

Father Gabriel's doctor was Zurab Varazishvili. To express his gratitude for his medical care, Father Gabriel gave him a sheep sacrificed to the Convent and said: "The workers deserve a reward. To bestow gratitude to a doctor means to glorify God." But the doctor refused to take the sheep as he considered his assistance should be gratuitous.

The same day the sheep died. The Elder rebuked the doctor, "Nobody has ever heard the sacrificed animals to die at the Convent, this is the first time because of your disobedience, my neighbour." The Elder gave him another sheep and the doctor accepted it with thanks.

On May, 2000 the nuns from our Convent went to the Monastery of Shiomgvime to celebrate the festive day of Saint Shio. Divine Liturgy was performed by Metropolitan Daniel and the Supplication Service at the reliquary of Saint Shio - by His Beatitude Elias II. While the festive table was being laid, I passed through the refectory and from the balcony viewed the altar and frescoes of the church that were clearly seen. I was saying the Jesus prayers with a rosary of beads and my thoughts were drawn towards Father Gabriel. All of a sudden, I lifted my head and couldn't believe my eyes. Up above the fresco such a bright radiance was emitting that it was difficult to distinguish what it was. With some efforts I could read the inscription written in old Georgian: Saint Gabriel of Georgia. Father Gabriel was holding the icon of the Holy Virgin. Next to him were the icons of Saint Shushanik and Saint Ketevan – the beloved icons of Father Gabriel. I was overwhelmed with irresistible joy. Who knows how many times I visited Shiomgvime Monastery, but I had never seen these icons. I told Archimandrite Michael, the Heghumenos of the Shiomgvime Monastery about the vision. Father Gabriel made me feel his patronage as Saint Gabriel of Georgia. The vision strengthened my faith on immortality of soul. I realized that our "salos" Elder is our patron, consoler and interceder.



Archpriest Vakhtang (Asatiani)

We visited Father Gabriel's church with my friend. The monk welcomed me heartily, laid hands on me and blessed me. A small church filled with icons was divided into small beautifully arranged sections. I had never seen anything like that before. My heart was filled with happiness and pride; to be close to such a great clerical meant something. I was impressed by his speech that was so captivating as if God spoke through his words. It made me change my life for ever and follow the path of light.

In my memory Father Gabriel will remain as a chosen ascetic and the greatest clerical.

Archpriest Ushanghi (Charkviani)

The Elder's father was buried within the precincts of the church of Saint Barbara. Father Gabriel's family lived nearby the church and the Elder often attended Vespers, Matins. He suffered much because his father was a communist, who participated in the destruction of churches. Father Gabriel often performed Memorial Services raising his prayers to God to save his father's soul. I am certain the Holy Virgin has heard his ardent prayers.

I express my gratitude to God for giving me a chance to perform the Divine Liturgy at the Church of Transfiguration of Samtavro Convent together with Father Gabriel. It is difficult to convey my feeling, it was an unforgettable festivity. One should have seen graceful movements of Father Gabriel's hands and heard his homilies. I never doubted that he was blessed by the Divine Grace and always referred to him with due reverence. I remember every moment of being next to him and foster within my heart his love in union with Christ.

Father Gabriel...

Archimandrite Gabriel...



Elder Gabriel was a surprising synthesis of flourishing monasticism of Middle Ages and persecuted monasticism of the 20th century - the image of holy fathers so well known from old chronicles. Being a great ascetic and at the same time childishly meek, he was emitting divine radiance. His expressive hands, moving, forceful, persuasive words were leading the beginners towards the path of light. At the same time he could be a stern and denouncing accuser for experienced Christians.

The beginning of Lent in March 1992 was fixed firmly in my mind. It was God's will that on the 55th year of my life I happened to meet Father Gabriel, as we joked "at about 11 o'clock." The merciful Lord has counted me worthy to serve Him as the last ones hired (Matthew 20:6).

Being experienced in secular life, I had rather a vague idea not only about monastic and church life, but also about the way how to behave in front of clericals.

Father Gabriel was an unsurpassed edifier, a guide on the path towards the Temple for those who revealed their free will to lead a life of an Orthodox Christian.

It was the period when I, inspired by magnificence of temples in Germany, Austria, Hungary, impressed by their pomposity, enchanted by Benedictine Monasteries, their monks, overwhelmed with ineffaceable impressions of Gregorian chants and captivating Bach's organ music, found myself unprepared for the enchanting gift of Father Gabriel's sagaciousness. I remember well my first confession, first Holy Communion at Samtavro Convent... first kneeling and first blessing of Father Gabriel to attend All-Night Vigils. Father Gabriel's virtues were already well known to Georgians. It was no mere chance that I drew a parallel between the Benedictine, Catholic and Eastern Monasticism, whose merited bearer was Father Gabriel. I realized fully the enormous difference between those Christian monasticisms only after I met Father Gabriel. It is not difficult for a refined connoisseur to see the difference

between the chants performed to the accompaniment of organ music and polyphonic, orthodox live choir chants; between believers sitting on their chairs and those standing bowed, though tired but at the same time filled with grace.

The Elder impressed everyone by his refined old Georgian language, interspersed with wisdom of the Scripture of the Athonites. Even those who were ignorant of Orthodox belief and visited the Convent for his blessing, were exerted by the magnetic force and grace radiated from father Gabriel. He was sowing the seeds of righteous faith. Father Gabriel often had worshippers from the capital as well as from different regions of Georgia, who used to come to him for edifications.

Time has left its mark upon the contemporary monasticism. Monks broke themselves of the habit of rational work and toil. Father Gabriel kept vigil, according to the typicon of the Monastery. He was wearing himself out with hard work. He kept working even when he was talking with pilgrims or guests in his cell or outside it. He used to restore or make frames for icons, or clean the church implements. There was never unimportant work for Father Gabriel, any work was to be done to glorify God.

The Elder was known as a stern denouncer. If any need, he would point out to the guilty, made him kneel down raising his voice at him.

A few days after the Holy Week, my spiritual father led me in the Sanctuary and put a sticharion on me. For me it was such a high reward that after the Divine Liturgy I decided to show my gratitude to God by washing the floor in the Sanctuary and amvon. Father Gabriel entered the Sanctuary several times but by his expression I could not understand whether he approved my zeal. Usually he never missed a chance to make a remark that was beneficial both for body and soul. Several months passed. A few days before the Transfiguration Feast he called me and said gently: "You have done general "uborka" ("cleaning" in Russian) in Holy Week without a blessing. No! It can't go like that! We make "uborka" before Transfiguration. We don't need anyone, we'll manage, just two of us." Full of enthusiasm, we were polishing everything: the courtyard, doors, walls and implements. Father Gabriel looked marvelous with his sleeves rolled up. He was cleaning the copper and bronze candle holders with tooth powder and paraffin.

As for my ecclesiastical congregation that I joined tardily, he was asking magnanimously and rhetorically with artistic gesticulation: "Where from is such humbleness, my neighbour?"

Having the gift of reading the thoughts and delivering discourse, he answered the question put by himself. "You are sent by God to this world with a clerical mission."

His prophesy came true on October 14, 1992, on the feast day of the Robe of the Saviour by His Beatitude Elias II I was ordained a deacon and soon a priest. By this time Father Gabriel's health aggravated. He didn't leave his cell. He was glad to hear from me that the icon of Holy Trinity with the encasing made by himself was placed at the Holy Trinity Church at Dzegvi.

Father Gabriel's blissful face emitting heavenly joy will remain in my memory for ever. In his clear look there was no evidence of hard life full of feats and contradictions. Suffering from unbearable pains due to his severe disease, he placed his trust on God's will meekly till his last breath.

SchemHeghumene Johanna (Sikharulidze)

Father Gabriel was my spiritual father and my friend. We have known each other for 40 years. The Elder's personality was identified with chastity and love. He welcomed heartily anyone in need, whether he was rich, poor, high-official or an ordinary man. The first and most important condition was to host a stranger, to offer him meals, simple, but tasty. As for his meal it was too scarce. He never took meat, he would be pleased to give away any food brought to him.

The Elder's day started very early, he was led by his guardian angel to a place from where to start his work. He often walked up to a garbage heap where he rather often could find church implements and very old icons discarded by atheists. In such case he came back in great joy with a precious finding. The next step was to clean, polish and place it venerably. The church built by himself is filled with such icons.

The congregation that time was small. On week days, Father Gabriel visited various churches and we accompanied him. On Monday he used to go to Didubeh church, on Tuesday to Holy Trinity, on Wednesday to Kashveti, on Thursday to Saint David's church on Mtatsminda (Holy Mountain); on the rest days of the week he attended services at the Zion Cathedral Church.

After the Divine Liturgy he would sit in the courtyard surrounded by fellow-Christians. He never left unanswered any question. It was amazing - whatever he said came true.

I recollect one episode. I had a friend, her name was Mariam, she was Georgian. During the Bolsheviks invasion to Georgia she fled to Constantinople. By the time she came back to Georgia she was very old and soon died. I suffered her loss deeply. At Saint David Church on Mtatsminda, in my prayers I was entreating God to send me someone who needed care. Father Gabriel's words appeared to be the answer, he said: "I will take you to an old lady" and he did.

The old lady was confined to bed and had no one to look after. We took care of her till her death. Father Gabriel performed Memorial Service.

The Elder experienced many troubles in his daily life in Tbilisi. He asked me to go to Mtskheta and ask the Metropolitan Elias (now Catholicos-Patriarch Elias II) to allot a cell for him at the Convent of Samtavro. I couldn't imagine how to refer to the Metropolitan with such a request. But Father Gabriel kept asking with his eyes filled with tears: "You have to do it, my sister, if there is love in your heart." Though it was too difficult for me, I couldn't refuse. To my request the Metropolitan said: "I will fulfill your request whenever there is such a possibility. Now the Patriarch is His Beatitude Ephrem and Mtskheta is in his diocese."

Time passed. After being consecrated, Patriarch Elias II did not forget his promise and Father Gabriel finally got his long-dreamed cell at the Convent.

His Beatitude loved Father Gabriel who was always under his special concern. Father Gabriel was already very weak and could not be present at the ceremony of his ordination to the rank of Archimandritis, so I

was the first to bring him good news. I will never forget his childishly shining eyes.

A few days before his death, he was lying motionless looking at the icons. I asked him if there was anything I could do for him. He said: "Pray for everyone – this is my testament."

I know that even now the Elder appears to many people in their dreams and cures and comforts them. And I am certain Father Gabriel gives ardent prayers for All Georgia and his prayers are raised to God.

Schemanun Nino (Dashniani)

When a child, I lived in Akhlagori, in the neighborhood of the Palace of great Georgian martyrs Shalva and Elizbar Eristavi. The Palace was occupied by the district committee of the Communist party, the court church was in ruins. I often visited the place and felt the flood of divine radiance emitting from this holy place. I was so inspired I could see the faces of holy clericals participating in Divine Services. I think it was due to their blessing that finally I chose the monastic life. My predecessors were also pious Christians, in our house Even under the hardest atheistic regime, we managed to make candles and celebrate feasts to glorify God. The most beloved feast for us was the Ascension.

I started fasting at the age of five. I remember how my brother took a lump of cheese at my neighbour's house in Holy Week and I rebuked him. He put it back on a plate immediately. We attended Services with our family at a church built in a beautiful place in the forest. It was very impressive - people gathered together to glorify God.

My life passed with full trust in God until a great trial. My six years old grandson Zura has lost his sight in a game with his neighbour. The grief was so deep that it caused immediate death of my son. One misfortune followed by the other paralyzed me. I lost faith, I couldn't say prayers any more, couldn't even make the cross sign. I didn't understand why I was punished. From morning till night I was weeping at the cemetery until I became confined to bed. On Holy Saturday I felt as if someone was squeezing me by throat. I heard my kinsfolk

wailing. I asked to call a priest. The priest from Kashveti church Father Andrew calmed me down saying my son was alive and we'll see each other in our next life. His words restored my faith.

Father Andrew was pleased to hear I had been fasting since childhood. I didn't know that confession was the contrite acknowledgment of sins to obtain absolution. I did not consider myself sinful then and Father Andrew explained to me there was not a single person without a sin. After my confession I partook of Holy Communion and I felt better. I started attending services at the Zion Cathedral church. My heart was filled with happiness when His Beatitude told me my son was alive and took my son's photo. His Beatitude entered his name in the red album and he remembers my son till now.

After my son's funeral, His Eminence Thaddeus brought me a prayer book and a book by Dr. Raymond Moody "Life after Death." He asked me if I knew what a loving Elder we had in Georgia and advised me to go to him. Having taken his address I went to see the Elder.

The loving Elder appeared to live near Saint Barbara church. At the door of his church I pronounced the Jesus prayer. The door opened, and a monk of medium height with lively eyes, wearing a mantle welcomed me heartily. To my amazement, in his chapel all 33 oil lamps were lit. In front of each Holy Virgin's icon there was a bottle of perfume.

Having taken his blessing I lit a candle and thought, "Where from he has got so many icons." Father Gabriel answered immediately, "From garbage." I tried to hide my surprise and continued my prayers. As I finished Father Gabriel told me the story of each icon in detail. I wished his narration could never end. The Divine Grace was emanating from him. I left the church, small by size but great by spirit filled with heavenly joy.

One day we went together with my friend to Svetitskhoveli Cathedral. Heghumene Ketevan, whom I already knew, was attending the Divine Liturgy together with the nuns. She advised me to find the nun Tatiana who was an ardent prayer. It was the time when Father Gabriel lived already at the Convent in a small wooden cell next to the bell-tower (the cell does not exist any more). I approached father Gabriel for blessing and reminded him about myself. He was glad to see me

and blessed me. From nun Tatiana I learnt they held Memorial Services every Saturday after the Divine Liturgy. First I started coming to the Convent every Friday bringing memorial meals and then three times a week. I offered meals to Father Gabriel, who was actually not eating but taking small bites or giving it to someone.

Once I felt an acute pain in my heart and fainted. Everyone around was in panic, they wanted to call an emergency ambulance, but I managed to mutter: "Take me to the Convent." My husband calmed me down saying: "We'll take you tomorrow, only don't die." In the morning they took me to the Convent where I remained for ever. My first deaconess was in the kitchen. I was taking meals to Father Gabriel. Standing at his door with a tray I pronounced the Jesus prayers waiting for his blessing. Only after the third prayer he would open the door with the words "Amen." Sometimes he would leave the tray, saying "Just for your sake", sometimes he would refuse.

Father Gabriel often humbled the nuns. Twice he made me kneel down and I didn't raise until he blessed me to. As for Heghumene Ketevan he would address her in an affected manner: "The Heghumene of Georgia is coming!"

When preparing for partaking of Holy Communion, Father Gabriel dressed in a mantle and with kamilavka stood at the end of the line, listening to the Divine Liturgy with veneration. At the amvon he would turn round with a bow and showing particular humbleness was asking for forgiveness from everyone in such a sweet manner that aroused feeling of tenderness. This wonderful sight helped strengthen the faith bringing everyone closer to God.

It was winter, I felt seriously ill. Father Gabriel visited me in my cell. He called me "Xenia Blazenny" (St. Xenia the Blessed). "May I die, my God! How is it that you are ill!" He took off his shoes and raised his prayers to God: "Lord, I, monk Gabriel give my word of honour to go bare foot for three days for Xenia Blazenny to be cured." I started asking him to waive his pledge. However, Father Gabriel fulfilled his oath walking bare foot on snow for three days and stayed in good health. As for me I recovered completely.

On the eve of the Holy Trinity feast, Father Gabriel holding the candle, said: "We have to keep vigil all night." While opening the door

of the basement, he said: "I'll go down and will not ascend." All of a sudden he fell through. It appeared that three steps had been broken. Father Gabriel hit his head. I climbed down together with novice Melanie. We helped the Elder to rise and placed him on a trestle-bed. He was motionless, I thought he was dying. I was asking God to save our Elder. He told me sternly: "Cover me with my mantle and go upstairs."

At that time it was forbidden by Communists to bury monks in the precincts of Monasteries. Father Gabriel told me to dig a hollow secretly and bury him there. I was in panic. I couldn't imagine how to overcome such a loss. We covered him with his mantle. He repeated: "Leave me now, I am a monk." We were forced to leave him.

I went to the church and in front of the icon of the Holy Virgin was entreating the Mother of God to keep save our dear Elder. Leaving the church I saw Father Gabriel standing in front of his cell. I screamed with joy.

Nun Pelagia's daughter Maria fell ill and was in a very grave condition. Doctors couldn't put a diagnosis. Father Gabriel told the nun to bring her daughter to him. Maria came, she was twenty five years old then. He let her into the chapel, made me hold the icon of the Holy Virgin and poured water over it collecting the water in a bowl. Father Gabriel was entreating: "The Most Holy Mother of God, Healer and Quick to Harken, save Thy servant Maria and be her protectress." He made Maria drink the water from the bowl, and to my amazement she recovered immediately.

Once the Elder told me to accompany him to the Zion Cathedral Church. I followed him with joy. At the entrance he started begging alms: "Help me for Christ's sake." I stood aside surprised, ashamed. Soon he collected 400 Rubles. He did the same at the Church of Holy Trinity and then he gave all to the poor.

Father Gabriel gave me as a gift an icon of the Iberian Holy Theotokos ("Portaitissa") with an encasing made by himself. He was an expert at wood works. I donated the icon to the church of Saint Andrew the First Called of Khulo.

Father Gabriel was always bearer of God's Grace. For me he will remain the most beloved and humble servant of God. In his homilies the words "God is Love" were constantly repeated.

By the blessing of Heghumene Ketevan, I have written the memoirs of our venerable Elder, Archimandrite Gabriel. I thank the Lord for giving me such a possibility.

Archimandrite Sabbas (Kutchava), Heghumenos of the Iberian Holy Virgin Monastery on Mahata Hill

I met Father Gabriel at Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino. On entering the Church of Transfiguration I was forced by some invisible power to turn my head. A smiling look of the Elder was full of love. Since my childhood I have been dreaming to meet such a great ascetic. I was rejoiced when he called me, settled me next to him and said, "Love has visited us." He led me to his cell and gave me the first edification: "At the last time if you see a sinner, don't condemn him if you want to preserve love. Remember many sinners were cured and became healers. I need a lay brother. If you agree I will ask His Beatitude to give his blessing for you to share my cell." I was filled with happiness and decided to remain next to him for ever. He put a sleeveless garment on me and blessed me to clean the precincts of the Convent. I was working with enthusiasm, the Elder keeping an eye on me.

Whenever we went to Svetitskhoveli he used to say, "Let's move on to Mtskheta." He repeated the same when we were returning back. He introduced me to the novices of Svetitskhoveli, blessed everyone with his innate heartfelt warmth and imposed a penance on each of them. Under his guidance, any kind of work was done with incredible lightness, as for himself he was tiring out his body.

Father Gabriel always offered meals to everyone, he never let anyone leave without being treated. As for his ration, it was too scarce.

During my studies at the Theological Academy, I decided to stay for the whole Lent period at the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral Church whose Father Superior then was the present Metropolitan Abraham (Garmelia). I went to Tbilisi to get blessing from His Beatitude. I was very excited having deep veneration towards our Catholicos-Patriarch. I found His Beatitude in the Patriarchal yard. Having learnt the purpose of my



Father Gabriel's cell inside the Old Tower
(built by the King of Georgia Mirian III in the 4th century)



Icons in Father Gabriel's cell

visit, he blessed me. I was overwhelmed with joy. Father Gabriel appreciated highly His Beatitude's virtues, his zeal and would often say: "Our Patriarch carries a heavy Cross, to condemn him means to sprinkle burning charcoal on one's own head."

The edifications of the Elder primarily were concerned with obedience and humbleness.

"My sons, never do anything without blessing of your spiritual father, never decline the blessing even if the blazing angel in his grandeur appears before you."

Sometimes Father Gabriel denunciations made on top of his voice referred personally to no one, and it was amazing that only the denouncer understood the meaning of his words while others had no idea what he was talking about.

It was interesting that Father Gabriel's words were recalled exactly at right time and saved people from troubles. It was hard to perceive his thoughts, but for him the souls were transparent, through his spiritual discernment all the deceptions were cut through.

Once young fellows came for confession to Father Gabriel but found it difficult to start. Father Gabriel gently started revealing their sins and they had nothing to add. Having taken his edifications, they left relieved.

The Elder was endowed by God with various gifts in abundance. Who knows how many souls were saved, how many bodies cured through his prayers. Once I suffered from a gall-bladder attack. I was pressing the painful spot with my hand. Father Gabriel asked me: "What am I here for?" Making the cross sign he proclaimed: "In the name of Jesus Christ, in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen." Immediately I felt relief from pain.

I asked the Elder's blessing to visit my mother. He said he wanted to go with me. My mother was very happy to see us, she laid the table. All of a sudden, overwhelmed with feelings Father Gabriel started wailing: "My dear mother was always waiting for me while I was circling round Georgia." I was surprised to hear that Father Gabriel's mother was alive. She was an affectionate, humble, kind-hearted woman. When she decided to choose monastic life, he rejoiced like a child. She was tonsured by me.

Father Gabriel stayed with us for two weeks. Within this period lots of people were coming to see the Elder. For each one he had a different

remedy. Someone was strengthened spiritually, in someone's heart love was implanted. Whenever the Elder noticed vanity in someone, he humbled him by kneeling him down and then cheered him by hugging: "Love makes me do it, brother."

My mother Rusudan was doing obedience in the refectory at the Convent of Saint Nino. She recalls: "Father Gabriel never approved of slackness in any matter. In the kitchen he was showing the nuns fantastic skills of cooking while talking about love, obedience, strengthening of faith. His simple words were etched in our memories leaving ineffaceable traces of true love."

It was the period of Lent. Father Gabriel knew I was summoned by His Beatitude to Tbilisi. He was saying prayers with his raised hands for a long time. He said to me, "They intend to take you to Tbilisi. Pray so that you stay in Mtskheta. Your tonsure will be discussed."

The Elder saw me off and I left with his blessing, filled with his fatherly love and warmth.

It appeared that it was my mother who insisted on my removal from the Monastery.

I fell ill. My mother understood she was doing something wrong. She took me by hand as a small child and brought me to His Eminence Daniel and asked him what monasticism meant, to which she got the answer: "George (my secular name) knows what it is." My mother said: "If so, I entrust him to His Beatitude and to you." This way my tonsure was decided to be performed on Lazarus Sabbath. For Father Gabriel, all events had been known long before.

We were crossing a bridge with Father Gabriel and my brother, when a beggar approached us extending his hand. Father Gabriel hugged him, consoled and gave him some money. My brother was glad we could help him. "It's not us", said Father Gabriel, "it was God's blessing to make us give alms to the poor."

Father Gabriel was planning to go to Tbilisi for purchasing some articles for the Convent. He had one hundred Rouble notes. On a bus stop he heard two bee-keepers talking with grief they couldn't get one hundred Roubles to save their bees. Father Gabriel took all the money he had out of his pocket, gave it to them and returned to the Convent. The next day two well known artists visited the Elder and donated one

thousand Roubles. Father Gabriel said with a smile: "Whatever is given out for kind deeds is rewarded ten times by God."

The Elder was miraculously changing the way of life of his fellow-men, setting them on the right path. Once a Jehovah witness was brought to the Elder. He listened to the visitor's long story attentively and then said: "I have never heard such a nice and peaceful speech." The Elder did not rebuke him neither put to shame. Father Gabriel's kind words, his true love had violently disturbed the Jehovah's witness' heart and made him repent and kneel down asking for forgiveness.

Father Gabriel perceived past and predicted future with astonishing accuracy. Once he sent me to Svetitskhoveli to bring some pills. I was in a hurry to obey his blessing and return as soon as possible. But a novice didn't look to be in great haste, he was washing calmly his hands, I got irritated and rebuked him. When I returned, Father Gabriel met me with a sullen face and said strictly, "We go back to Svetitskhoveli now." When we came, he called the novice and without comments fixed his look on me and then changed the subject.

After Vespers, a young girl having heard about Father Gabriel's gifts decided to see him. She was standing outside the door of his cell not daring to enter. She was thinking "If he is such a great prophet why doesn't he feel my state." All of a sudden Father Gabriel appeared with his hands on his hips and cried out: "Who told you I am a prophet?! You were afraid to come and still you have come!" He led her inside his cell. Their conversation continued for quite a long time. She forgot to ask him to interpret a passage from the newspaper "Madli." As she was leaving he stopped her saying, "If you read a newspaper and there is anything you don't understand, you can refer to me." The girl was amazed. Such was Father Gabriel's gift to perceive concepts, ideas, and thoughts.

Last years of his life Father Gabriel spent at the Convent of Saint Nino. At that time I was spiritual father of the Convent. Everyone was bustling around. I raise thanks to God for giving me a chance to take care after the Elder and partaking him of Holy Communion. I recall with gratitude each unforgettable day spent with such a great ascetic.

Father Gabriel's care and love are with us forever and we feel his intercession.



Heghumene Mariam (Mikeladze), Convent of Transfiguration

*Father Gabriel was alive among the corps,
we all were the corps shrunk into our egoism...*

The first time I saw Father Gabriel, he was entering the Zion Cathedral Church and shouting. At that time I considered myself a very pious Christian. I had my own "ecclesiastic" approach to all matters. Being in a state of spiritual deception, I was unable to estimate the Elder's invaluable gifts and considered him mentally ill, though his eyes filled with love and grief contrasted with his superficial rage, hampered issuance of my final verdict.

Our next encounter was at the Convent of Saint Nino. Again I saw the discrepancies between his eyes and his actions. It was the time when I decided to become a nun. My general knowledge was based on books, with no experience. Father Gabriel was given a cell at the Convent of Samtavro. The most beneficial thing he did for me was that he had destructed the monastic stereotype created within myself. My principle that deceived me was based on theories of creating spiritual comfort. I was searching for a lonely place where I could be plunged in my thoughts with God. When I found it finally, all of a sudden Father Gabriel's screaming voice interrupting my communication with God, "Come, quickly, make soup, the intellectuals have arrived", made me furious.

I got angry when reading my prayers, he snatched the book and threw it away with a scream: "Why are you disturbing the Lord?!" Later on I understood my prayers were lifeless, dry, just formal, without strive for salvation. As for father Gabriel every moment of his life was self-sacrificing in the name of Christ. I don't think there was any moment when he was not with God. He was honoured and loved by those who felt his deep faith and grace and I think this meant for people much more than his miracles and predictions.

He delivered preaches on a Samaritan woman, on prophets or sitting on a stump like a good grandfather was reading us about the life of saint Georgi Mtatsmindeli. Sometimes his indignation was due to our innate indifference. He was always doing something: making enclosing icons, or cleaning candle holders. At critical moments his edifications were beneficial, but sometimes he would behave so as to raise doubts as for his ever being in mind. But edifications were given, the job was done. Due to my faults, sometimes I showed indifference, or condemned him, joining others who had no reverence towards him. Irrespective of my attitude, I always felt boundless love giving off from him. He knew he was condemned, but he kept forgiving us. There were some moments when only Father Gabriel could understand my inner state, and he was ready to give support; he has never been indifferent.

The first Holy Easter at the Convent was engraved upon my memory. A few minutes were left before the midnight. Everyone was nervous and confused. Nobody knew what to do: who was supposed to hold icons, processional banners, ring the bells. Being concerned with external form, we forgot the most important. Suddenly Father Gabriel rushed into the church announcing triumphantly: "Christ is risen!" He lit great joy in our hearts. We responded "He is risen indeed!" and then things went swimmingly.

Before the 9th of April 1989 the Convent led its routine life. The Elder having foreseen the disaster was ringing the bell at midnight crying: "Wake up, everyone! Georgia is in bloodshed." Unfortunately, nobody could understand him and he was left alone with his grief. After the tragic events in our country, having lost hope, I asked Father Gabriel if Georgia would survive. He answered with his brightly shining face: "Her salvation starts right now." Father Gabriel's power of love attracted lots of different people both believers and unbelievers. The latter being in contact with him became devoted Christians, inseparable bodies of the church. Particular attention was paid to those rejected and very poor. He could keep listening to them for hours.

I regret we were unable to appreciate his merits. As the time passes I become more confident he was one of the greatest ascetics, who dedicated all his life to God. I know even now he helps and forgives me.



Heghumene Theodora (Makhviladze), Bodbe Convent of Saint Nino

First I met father Gabriel at the Zion Cathedral Church in 1986. His unusual behaviour, loud cries during the Divine Liturgy attracted my attention. I was watching him from a distance. When leaving the church, he fell down before His Beatitude asking for forgiveness. Since then, Father Gabriel's face fixed firmly in my heart.

After two years I met him at the Convent of Samtavro where I was accepted as a novice. As soon as I heard his powerful voice, I hurried towards the door of the church and as I opened it, I appeared right in front of him: I felt as if electricity passed throughout my body. Whether it happened because of fear or admiration, I couldn't realize, I was stricken dumb, facing a man from another world. "I heard the love itself has visited us", he said gently. Then suddenly turned around and pointing to novice Nino (now Heghumene Mariam) said: "You will be Heghumene in twelve years." To another one standing nearby he prophesied: "You will be half Shushanik." (Shushanik is a Georgian Saint Martyr). He greeted all of us in such an unusual manner. Since that day Father Gabriel has remained at the Convent of Samtavro. He chose a small wooden hen-coop as his abode. It was late autumn and it was rather cold. Though he warned us sternly: "Here the monk Gabriel will reside and nobody dares to enter it, none of you", we decided to clean his cell together with nun Mariam and while we were doing it, the Elder appeared before us. We bowed our heads expecting another burst of anger but he approved of our efforts and blessed us. From that time on for four years I was constantly next to the Elder. Soon the feeling of fear and confusion was replaced by love and I became closer to him, though the feeling that he "was from another world" never left me. His behavior was unpredictable and inexplicable. He could hire a taxi and leave it without paying, or he could overpay for the ride. Without any visible reason, he could kick high officials or ordinary people out of the temple using abusing words. For weeks, he could walk barefoot in

winter. All of a sudden, he would stop the traffic, beg money or dance and sing any time, in any place. His attitude towards people was individual. Someone was trampled down, someone praised and inspired for kind deeds. Someone was pressed to drink wine "do dna", someone to kneel down with no blessing to rise for hours.

I often tried to analyze his actions that violated accepted social norms, but could not find any logic. Intuitively, I was devoted to him and trusted him.

One day Father Gabriel took me to the Church of Holy Trinity in Tbilisi, where he started begging alms. I was standing next to him and he was giving to me all money collected. Among the congregation I saw my acquaintances. By their surprised faces I understood I looked confused, but I didn't mind as I was with Father Gabriel.

I often saw the Elder when he was in a grave and earnest disposition mainly in his fantastic church built by himself where he usually retreated during the Lent and refused to accept anyone except us. Here Father Gabriel was plunged in his thoughts, he never joked, his edifications showed spiritual perfection, "I realized my infirmity", he used to say. I understood these words were coming out of his experience. His talk was so captivating that it was not easy to realize how long our conversation lasted – for hours or seconds, as with him no duration in time existed. In such cases even his face was different: healthy appearance, peaceful expression. Gradually, I became convinced that the Elder's words and actions were the reflection of his deep faith and enormous love for the neighbour. He dedicated his life to keeping two main commandments: love for God and the neighbour. He never refused to console "the insulted and humiliated" souls, irrespective of their moral status, nationality or faith. His wrath never caused depression, it awakened a person from spiritual indifference and sluggishness.

We knew that at nights he was alone in his cell, but we heard his voice: sometimes he was yelling or arguing or talking with someone. It was clear he was communicating with someone. His concealed nocturnal contacts with some invisible forces sometimes frightened me. He had his own vision.

Once we went to the Monastery of Shiomgvi for the festive day of Saint Shio. A lot of people participated in the Divine Liturgy. After

the sermon during the festive meal he unexpectedly addressed a man asking him if he had committed any grave sin. The latter acknowledged it. Everyone was confused, but Father Gabriel so skillfully changed the subject into jokes that the tension was immediately relieved. I was amazed: how the Elder perceived the sin and how the man humbled himself openly. The man subsequently became a clerical.

One day a young girl came to Father Gabriel for blessing. He started wailing: "Two horrible sufferings are awaiting her, her pain can be compared with piercing the heart of the Holy Virgin." And indeed, two tragic events happened with her that left its mark on all her life.

After confession I left the church with my spiritual father who strictly demanded from me something, for which I was not spiritually ready. My mind was split. I was in a state of depression. As we entered the refectory, Father Gabriel said to him: "What are you doing, don't you feel sorry for her? Don't you see how weak she is? Do you know in what state she is?" He felt my state and cheered me up: "Nobody knows how brave is Theodora. She can dismount the fiercest rider and mount promptly a galloping horse."

During those four years I spent at Samtavro, father Gabriel did not enjoy full recognition. Though he was loved by many people, some considered him addicted to drinks. But it never rose his irritation, he showed amazing tolerance as he never needed either recognition or reward.

Once at midnight, a few hours before our morning prayers, we were awakened by the ringing of the bells. Father Gabriel was shouting loudly: "Wake up, Georgia is in bloodshed, Georgians are killing each other!" We couldn't understand then why Father Gabriel was constantly disturbing us, giving no chance to have a nap at night, until severe trials fell upon our Motherland.

It is rather difficult to convey all the feelings related with Father Gabriel, or make an attempt to reflect his spiritual perfection. He showed us the way of salvation, helped us to get rid of superficial ideas and strengthened our faith.



Nun Paraskeva (Rostiashvili), Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino

I had a dream I was appointed a lay-sister in Father Gabriel's cell. He was teaching me how to lead the God pleasing life. The next day my dream came true, Heghumene Ketevan blessed me to take care after the Elder who was ill.

I hurried to Father Gabriel's cell to tell him about my dream and the blessing. When he learnt I had not told the Heghumene about my dream, he said: "You should have told her about it. That's what I was asking the Holy Virgin. Glory be to Her."

My knowledge about monastic life was confined to some books describing the lives of saints. I studied Father Gabriel's way of life with interest and compared it with those of holy fathers.

The nuns brought some rice porridge into father Gabriel's cell. I was not sure if I could eat there. While cleaning the icon casing he lifted his face and said: "Eat, if you want." He came up to the table, took a plate, cleaned it with a cloth he was holding and passed it to me. When I started eating, I felt the porridge tasted paraffin, the one he used for cleaning the frames. I didn't dare to make any comment and continued eating. A few minutes later, he took the plate, cleaned it with the same cloth and tried the food. "Oh, the cloth was in paraffin. How could you eat?" he said smiling. Then he asked me if I wanted to study. I said "Yes." "Then you have to remember very well, it's you who wants to study," he said and made me repeat it again.

In old times holy fathers tested novices by treating them offensively. If the beginners tolerated it patiently, they remained in the Monastery, otherwise they were sent back. When the Elder kicked me out of his cell all of a sudden I remembered it was my choice. In such cases, I would return back asking for forgiveness and the Elder would feel happy. Sometimes he made me angry intentionally. Knowing well my negative traits, he was trying to uproot them. The Elder would warn me: "You will be attacked today, let's see if you can endure it." He was testing me to find out how I would react to slander, insult, and abuse. Sometimes I failed and he used to tell me with his eyes filled with tears: "I want you to grow quickly, my child. When you think about me,

remember I was making you angry, because the angrier you become the stronger is my love. That is not my teaching, it comes from God."

I was standing at Father Gabriel's cell and some pilgrims asked for a glass of water. Since there was no water running from the tap, I directed them towards refectory as I did not want to disturb the Elder. Father Gabriel rebuked me: "How could you miss a chance to show mercy to your neighbour. Run quickly, even a glass of water given to the thirsty is a great deed in God's sight."

By his love for Christ, the Elder was drawing in everyone, guiding them through humbleness and obedience towards the Heavenly Kingdom. Father Gabriel used to say: "Only a humbled man, who is blessed by God and protected from trials, can enter the Heavenly Kingdom." Only after a certain time, we could understand the meaning of his tests for humbleness and obedience performed on us.

He kept repeating: "God needs our heart and kind deeds. Whatever good you have done to a man you did it to me," says God.

One day someone brought apples. Father Gabriel told me to make jam boiling the apples with seeds. I said it was impossible to make jam with seeds and took them out. A few days after, the jam in all of the jars was covered with mould.

Father Gabriel told me a story. A holy father had a novice whom he blessed to plant cabbage seedlings upside down. The novice thought the old man had lost his mind and planted the seedlings upright, but the cabbage didn't grow. The old man told him: "My son, this is the fruit of disobedience." The novice asked for forgiveness; and when he planted as he was blessed to, the cabbage grew nicely. The old man told him: "You see, my son, this is the fruit of obedience."

Some laymen brought the Elder thirty eggs. He blessed to leave fifteen and take back the rest. But they refused to take the rest eggs. Those fifteen eggs as the fruit of disobedience got rotten soon.

A monk asked Father Gabriel what fasting means. "One moment," said the Elder and started enumerating all the monk's sins since his childhood. The monk was confused, fell to his knees in repentance. Father Gabriel immediately became cheerful and offered him some food. The monk with a contrite heart said gloomily: "How can I eat in such a state?"



Archimandrite Gabriel



Lay sister of the Elder, Nun Paraskeva (Rostiashvili), who was in obedience to look after Father Gabriel in his cell

"That's exactly what fasting means when you repent by groaning and forget about food", said the Elder.

"Someone will say", said the Elder "I don't feel any appeal towards women. How can it be? Until sex distinction exists, there will always be feats of lust. Here the main thing is to overcome the appeal due to love for Christ, if you manage to do it, consider you have won the battle."

The Elder was resting in his cell. He asked a layman to go to the church and ask the hieromonk to give him the icon of 'The Saviour'. The hieromonk started searching the icon. After a while the icon was found in dust and with a deformed frame. The frame was fixed, the icon cleaned and placed in the altar. The hieromonk did not give the icon to the layman saying: "Father Gabriel sees it clearly, there is no need to take it to him." When the man retold everything to Father Gabriel, he said: "That's exactly what I wanted him to do."

Before the Lent on the Forgiveness Sunday, Father Gabriel on bended knees was asking everyone from the amvon to forgive him. If someone rebuked by him didn't appear before night, he would go himself to that person to ask for forgiveness.

With Father Gabriel all my worldly passions faded, I felt compassion and my mind became sober. Sometimes I felt such lightness as if I was moving in space. In such cases he started humbling me through humiliation. Whenever I felt such a heavy burden on my shoulders that made me helpless, he looked at me searchingly saying, "Cheer up! Hold on!"

It is rather difficult to describe the virtues he possessed but for sure he was a genuine Elder with Divine wisdom leading everyone towards light.

Once I had to go on errands to town. I heard Father Gabriel's voice from the stairs: "Remember, your spiritual father follows each your step." I wanted to see my relatives but I was afraid to go without his blessing, so I did errands quickly and returned to the Convent. All the time I felt as if the Elder was watching me.

It was a hot summer day. Father Gabriel was sitting and talking with someone in front of his cell in the sunshine. The man unable to endure any more the burning sun rays asked Father Gabriel to move to

a shade. The Elder gazed fixedly at the sun for some time and asked, "Is it so difficult to look at the sun?"

At noon he usually asked to lead him into his cell, saying: "You know I communicate with the Sun."

One woman asked Father Gabriel to give her an icon. I was surprised how dared she to make a request like this as I knew he loved all his icons. The Elder immediately took down an icon and a cross from the wall and gave them to her. The amazed woman throwing herself down at his feet, exclaimed, "You have read my thoughts, I wanted so much to have a cross also. Thank you very much!"

In Father Gabriel's cell a married couple was sitting. The woman was expecting a baby. Father Gabriel warned them: "The baby hears everything, try to be always in good spirits and use kind words." The husband objected: "I don't hear what the neighbour is doing behind my wall how can the baby hear in the belly." "Don't you believe?" he asked and by turning towards the mother, addressed the baby: "I'm asking you, the baby! Don't you hear the word of God?" The baby made so vigorous kicks that the mother was forced to go out.

The Elder was visited by a monk from Holy Mount of Athos, Greece. Father Steleanos, the Heghumenos of Xeropotamou Monastery was amazed when the Elder gave him the icon of his guardian saint whose name he was bearing. He knelt before Father Gabriel and asked him to move to the Mount of Athos where he would have whatever he needed. "I can never leave my Motherland", said Father Gabriel.

It was six o'clock in the evening. I was sitting with Father Gabriel in his cell. He said to me unexpectedly: "Leave me alone now, I'm not to be watched." "Why?" I asked him. "Leave me", he repeated turning his face away. Making some steps towards the door, I noticed his brightened face reflecting sunshine beams.

I was allowed to enter Father Gabriel's cell without saying a prayer. By making the sign of the cross I opened the door. I heard him speaking with someone but could find no one but him. To my question whom he was talking to, he answered, "To angels."

Once a woman came to Father Gabriel to thank him for saving her life. She told us the following story: "I live near the cemetery in a small abandoned house. One night the robbers rushed in by breaking the

door. I was frightened and started calling Father Gabriel for help. Father Gabriel appeared all of a sudden holding a truncheon in his hand, the robbers vanished immediately and Father Gabriel disappeared with them.

Being in his "salos" form, he was saying: "I am always wherever I want. I was also in Hades. It is the place below us. You can't imagine how people suffer there."

Father Gabriel was seriously ill and he said: "Now I'm going to Shavnabada Monastery." I thought he was joking. After a while I asked him:

- Have you visited Shavnabada Monastery, Father?
- Yes, they were having meals, when I came
- Did they see you?
- No, I didn't appear before them as they would be surprised
- What was the Heghumenos doing?
- He was counting the heads

A few days later the Heghumenos of Shavnabada Monastery Archimandrite Shio visited us. I asked him how many monks and novices there were in the Monastery. He said, "I never know, someone is coming, someone is leaving, I usually count them before meals." Father Gabriel fixed his smiling look on me. I was amazed - it was a miracle.

One day Father Gabriel was holding Memorial Services for a monk. There was some food brought for Memorial Service, but Father Gabriel brought exactly the same food the late monk had loved. All of a sudden Father Gabriel grew high over the table and was looking at us from above. We felt we were small and miserable. Having restored his primary form, he said, "Don't be offended."

A young German after looking at Father Gabriel for quite a long time, said: "I'm coming from Shiomgvime Monastery. I was told many stories about Saint Shio of Mgvime, but when I saw you, it seems to me you are Shio."

It was only once when we saw Father Gabriel very angry. He rose to his feet, knitted his brows and said: "You should not object me! I speak on behalf of the Holy Spirit!" All of a sudden we all noticed that the clear blue sky was covered with dark clouds in anticipation of heavy

storm. As soon as we asked for forgiveness, the Elder's smile was followed by appearance of the sun shining in the blue sky.

I was called out. I was going to leave when I heard Father Gabriel's weak voice calling me. I ran back and found him in convulsions as if strong electric current was passing through his body. After a while his power of speech recovered but it was not his voice. The Voice was prophesying Georgia's fate. Though I was doing my best to remember every word, everything erased from my memory. When Father Gabriel felt better, we raised him to his feet. When I asked him what it was, he answered 500 volts was nothing compared with the energy possessed by God.

On the eve of the festive day of Pentecost I saw a dream: a white dove as big as an eagle flew down from the sky. I understood it possessed a powerful force. It flew into Father Gabriel's cell and landed on his shoulder. I told Father Gabriel about my dream, though I couldn't disclose its meaning. (It's interesting to note that the white dove abides in the Convent).

One clerical asked Father Gabriel if coming down of the Holy Spirit is visible. Father Gabriel answered: "It looks like two small circles appearing in the form of fire flies, making circular rotations they gradually grow bigger and brighter. At this moment the Holy Spirit starts descending on you and you become filled with Holy Spirit. You have a feeling you possess the universe, you are able to see everything that is going on around; even if the whole army or the whole world is raised against you, you will overpower them without any effort."

Father Gabriel did not feel well. He asked to take him to the temple. Kneeling down in front of the icon of the Holy Virgin he was entreating: "Holy Virgin, take me as a sacrifice, only save Georgia." When overwhelmed with feelings of Georgia's fate, he used to ask me to sing him "Iavnana" (Lullaby). He felt his nation's pain as his own, "Woe is him, a monk or a priest who doesn't take the pain of his Motherland upon himself."

When in exchange for his love, Father Gabriel got insults, mock, humiliations, I asked him if he still loved his insulters, he replied sadly, "I love them even more and feel sorry for them."

He never made anyone wait outside his cell. "How can I be calm", he was saying "if someone is waiting for me? A good monk's heart should be as kind as a woman's." He would gather a whole crowd in his small cell and preach of eternal kindness: "The heart is strong, body is weak. Try to save your soul. The one who has managed to conquer his tongue and glut, is already on the right road. Leave all the material world, instead be concerned above all with the Kingdom of God and with what the Lord requires of you and He will provide you with all other things", he cited the Holy Scripture.

When I was washing his feet, he said to me, "God has concealed a mystery from you." I couldn't understand what he meant and asked him to explain. He said if there is God's will, it will be revealed to me. Soon I guessed his feet were as tender as the baby's, like those of angels' painted on icons.

Father Gabriel was asked if to steal food was a sin. The Elder answered it was the violation of a commandment and the thief would become an antichrist seal bearer.

To a question put - if it was possible to say lies in order to save a man, father Gabriel answered: "Sometimes you hide something in order to keep a man from harm." And he told us the following story. A robber came to a hermit asking to hide him from persecutors and the hermit hid him. When the persecutors asked him about the robber, the hermit said he hadn't seen anyone. "One must not lie because of fear, as it will be considered as a sin, but love for the neighbour is superior."

Once Father Gabriel asked us: "How do you understand the meaning the prayer will be considered as a sin."

- The prayer was not said correctly, we said
- No, it was said correctly
- It was not coming from heart
- No, it was coming from heart
- It was said with distracted attention
- Oh, you now claim privilege for ranking among saints, only saints can pray with concentrated mind.

We asked the Elder to explain. At that time a layman came in for blessing. Father Gabriel asked him to do a favour. The man refused saying he was too busy: "I shall see if I can do it later" and with these

words he left. Father Gabriel remarked: "Now that man will go and say prayers for five hours. Will God hear his prayers after he refused to help me? If you disobey the commandments, don't bother God, your prayers will be offensive. Kind deeds open the gates of Heavenly Kingdom, only humbleness will lead you in, and love will enable you to see the Lord. If prayers are not followed by kind deeds the prayers are dead."

There was a young couple who was married for many years and had no children; doctors were not encouraging. Father Gabriel made them kneel down, blessed them and said they had to perform three Supplication Services to Saint John the Baptist and their prayers will be heard. Father Gabriel calmed down the woman and assured her she would be a mother in a year. "If it is a boy, we'll give him your name", she said with a happy smile. "Why, Queen Tamar was a woman but wasn't she superior?" A year later, the couple brought their long-awaited baby Maria to be blessed by the Elder.

Father Gabriel could foresee all the events that will happen after his death. To strengthen us in faith he told us the following: "During the reign of each Patriarch there was always someone caught up in Apostacy. Schismatics also took place at Patriarch Ephrem's time, but as for me I was concerned with my own business. Remember, if someone runs away, it doesn't matter who or where, this has nothing to do with you, you sit and cry over your own sins!"

He continued: "Once I joined the talk about a priest that he had inclination towards drinks and blamed him in front of the Patriarch, though I didn't know the priest. At home we always had a good storage of wine. Usually I don't drink, but I felt I wanted to have some wine. I took a glass of wine, felt a little bit dizzy but still went to the Zion Cathedral Church. I entered the altar. Suddenly I staggered and the Patriarch kept me back with his hand. Nobody seemed to have noticed it but I understood why it happened. Remember: when you judge someone, you judge the Lord."

One day Father Gabriel ordered a young man to partake of Holy Communion immediately as he had not seen his soul. The fellow obeyed. In the evening his neighbour suggested him going to a party but after Holy Communion he didn't want to participate in the feast and refused



**Sitting (from left to right): Father Gabriel, His Holiness Elias II, Catholicos-Patriarch of All Georgia, Mother Zoile (Dvalishvili), Mother Epheumia (Khizanishvili).
Standing (from left to right): Nun Paraskeva (Ugrekheldidze), Nun Feodosia, Mother Daro (Achaidze) (aka Heghumene Anna), guest, Nun Tatiana (Urotadze) (later Schemanun Susanna), guests. In secular dress later Nun Anna (Shiolashvili)**



Father Gabriel with the Nuns of the Convent

to go. The neighbour took another fellow and after the party when they were returning home that fellow died in an accident.

Father Gabriel was staying with one family when a young fellow came in. Having foreseen threat for his life the Elder blessed him. When the fellow left, a stray bullet shot touched his hair without any harm.

Father Gabriel reminisced: "In my preaches in the streets of Tbilisi I was glorifying the Lord. All of a sudden, two teenagers snatched from my breast the pectoral reliquary, the cross and ran away. I called them and demanded to bring back the reliquary. They returned, gave it to me, as for the cross I didn't take it saying they would be judged by the cross. A week later, someone asked me to perform the Memorial Service for the boy who snatched away my cross."

It appeared that after that incident, the boy, though in a good health, unexpectedly fell ill and died. Someone asked father Gabriel if the boy's soul would be in the abyss. The father Gabriel answered: "No, I prayed for him."

The pectoral reliquary is hanging on the wall of Father Gabriel's cell. He warned me: "Don't touch it or I'll die immediately. Let the priest open it at the right time, it contains five relics. No woman is allowed to open it."

Father Gabriel's teachings were extraordinary. Sitting on the stairs outside his cell, he would call someone and ask him to fetch a bowl from his cell. That person would be puzzled, as he couldn't find the bowl, and the Elder would be shouting on top of his voice to reveal his weak points. Later on the person already "trained" in humbleness by the Elder could stand firm against the schemes of the devil.

Once I asked Father Gabriel if I could confess him my transgressions. He said: "Take a mirror and look at yourself, I don't think you can see yourself better than I do. I don't need your confession."

After attending the evening service some believers saw a wandering dog and started throwing stones at it. Heart broken Elder noted: "It would have been better for them not to come to church and pretend praying."

Father Gabriel loved to sit on a top stair and observe. Once he saw a priest ascending the stairs and asked me: "Do you want me to shake

him up?" I was scared. Father Gabriel addressed the priest rudely using the most abusing colloquialism. The priest stopped and answered calmly: "I'm much worse than that, Father Gabriel." The Elder hugged him lovingly saying, "You are my brother."

Father Gabriel used to take a jug of wine from his cell, would cover it with a cloth as if hiding weakness of his being addicted to drinks.

The Elder was a remarkable preacher, his homilies accompanied by artistic gesticulation were engraved upon believer's heart and mind. The Elder never wrote down anything. He wrote in people's thoughts. As time went by, the mind became lucid. I do not know how it happened, but a person remembered what was needed and recalled it exactly the right time. I remember how confused I was when I heard Father Gabriel saying: "Don't put me in a coffin, better keep it for my mother. It may happen that a dead person has to be buried the next day."

A few years later, in 2000, Father Gabriel's mother the nun Anna died on Wednesday of the Holy Week at 8 p.m. The next day we sent a messenger to the Patriarch who was performing the Divine Liturgy. He gave his blessing to bury her the same day. All of a sudden, I remembered Father Gabriel's words that had seemed so strange then. He could foresee his mother's burial five years ahead. He also said: "When a person dies, he needs a sheet of remission." Father Michael reminded me of the sheet. We sent a person to the Patriarchate. But since he did not appear for a long time, it was decided to bury the Elder's mother without the sheet. However, it appeared that the hollow of the grave was not wide enough. While everyone was concerned with the problem, the messenger appeared with the paper and as soon as the sheet was placed in the nun's hands the coffin was lifted and descended freely down the grave.

One day a priest brought his spiritual son to Father Gabriel for blessing. The novice was to be tonsured. To the priest's question how he liked the young man, Father Gabriel fixing his look on him hugged him and said: "You can tonsure him right away." The novice was tonsured but soon due to his shattered faith, he was caught up in apostasy. Finally, he returned to church. I am sure it was Father Gabriel's prayers that made him regain his faith. Transferring the Divine Grace by his hug, he had sealed his faith for ever. It is known from Saint Simeon's

life, that the saint "salos" used to hug people to seal God's grace on them.

I had a feeling of regret that Father Gabriel was not present at my tonsure. Later I understood he went only when his support was needed to divert the trials. In such cases he would wail loudly in front of icons entreating until he got a sign of remission.

Once in the process of tonsuring a nun, Father Gabriel started weeping: "Oh, my child I feel sorry for you, what a heavy cross you are taking!" Soon the nun took off the mantle breaking up with the church.

Father Gabriel made some high officials kneel down. Next to them was a man who refused to kneel down. Father Gabriel repeated his demand and as the man threw himself down he hit his head against the floor unable to rise until the Elder blessed him to.

Once a hieromonk told the Elder he did not believe in his miracles. "Kneel down", ordered Father Gabriel and the hieromonk knelt reverently. "And now I bless you to rise to your feet, if you can", said the Elder. "Can you imagine", recalled the hieromonk later, "I wanted to rise to my feet, but I could not!"

In 1965 on a pompous celebration of the 1st of May, Father Gabriel burnt Lenin's portrait hung on the wall of the building of the Council of Ministers. He was ruthlessly beaten and had eighteen fractures. He was sentenced to death. Being in a horrible state, Father Gabriel started entreating the Lord to save him and all of a sudden he felt immediate relief, inflow of the same power the Lord had bestowed Saint Gabriel the Athonite, Saint George the Hagiorite, Saint Simeon the Stylite.

Father Gabriel loved a very popular Georgian opera "Daisi" (composer Zakharia Paliashvili). He often went to the Opera House. His favorite scene was the one, where the Catholicos was blessing people. At that moment the Elder would rise to his feet bowing down, though he knew the Catholicos on the stage was an actor. Once there was some confusion on the stage. Taking advantage by a small interval, Father Gabriel climbed the stage preaching about Christ.

The Elder told us the story – he went to a Synagogue, "where holy fathers were preaching of Christ." At the entrance there was the icon of prophet Moses, whom Father Gabriel worshipped venerably.

Everyone looked pleased. He ascended the place from where the Bible was read and started preaching of Christ. The people were confused; they called the Magister, but the Magister didn't interrupt him. After Father Gabriel had finished his preach, the Magister invited the Elder to his office where they had long talks about Christ.

The Elder also visited a Mosque. When he entered, the people there were having tea. Having seen him in a mantle, they raised to their feet and asked to join them. "We were talking about love and parted with love", said Father Gabriel.

He also visited a Baptist church, but his appearance caused irritation of the congregation. They called their supervisor and Father Gabriel was kicked out.

A girl came to Father Gabriel complaining of constant quarrels in the family. Her brother ran out of the house. Without delay, the Elder went with the girl to her place. As they entered the room the brother was found at home. As he explained, some invisible force had brought him back. The Elder came up to the icon of the Holy Virgin and started entreating in front of it with his hands raised to Heaven; as the girl recalled, his face was flooded with Divine radiance and his prayers were so powerful, the spell, casted on the family was driven out of their house, and finally rest and peace were established forever in their family.

Father Gabriel was a Confessor of love. He repeated constantly: "Love each other, Georgia should be saved by love. You will live till the time of the antichrist. Those who maintain love for God and the neighbour, will be saved."

Someone asked Father Gabriel if we should love everyone. "Of course" he said. "It is written in the Holy Testament: 'love your enemy!' But how can we love Christ's enemies? Love is preceded by absence of hatred. If you possess the world with no love, consider you possess nothing."

Father Gabriel asked a layman: "Do you know what means 'to love your neighbour'?"

"Yes" he said, "When you save someone by shielding him from the bullet shot."

"No, I will explain to you: when your neighbour is seriously ill, and to get the medicine for him, you have to go through the forest at night far away; and if in spite of all kinds of dangers, you still go and save your neighbour - this means love. If you do so you will directly ascend the Heaven."

The Elder edified us: "First of all, seek the Kingdom of Heaven."

We asked how to seek it.

"When you eat" he answered, "you must remember there are people who are hungry, thirsty, experiencing hardships. Pray for them, the prayers can move the mountains."

Weeping bitterly he was saying: "The antichrist followers will walk naked in the streets."

Someone asked the Elder why God showed us people's misfortunes.

He answered: "In order to help them by our prayers, this way God teaches us how to love our neighbour. You can learn how to love and you have to strive for it. Never lose trust in God and you will be protected from hunger, thirst, or disaster."

"What are we going to do without you, if you die," I asked him.

The Elder answered: "Christ raised Lazarus from the dead, do you think it will be difficult for Him to raise me also? You will not be able to see me but ask God in your prayers and I'll always be with you."

The Elder said he would reach the time of the Second Coming of Christ. Then he turned abruptly: "The situation has changed. I have to leave. Bury me over there," he pointed to his burial place. We thought he was joking as the place was a rubbish peal then.

He had a vision: Queen Tamar showed him her burial place saying: "Here I am, Gabriel."

He recognized the place but didn't disclose it to us. "It will be revealed soon", he said. "I know where the icon of the Holy Face is. The one that is in the museum (also not made by human hands) has the same power. When this icon is taken out of the museum, the icon of the Holy Virgin of Atskuri will appear and the Iberian icon of the Mother of God will arrive from Holy Mount of Athos. From this time on the revival of Georgia starts."

On the territory of the Convent Giuli Chokhonelidze, the Georgia-film director was making a motion picture of Anthimus of Iberia (Antimoz

Iberieli). The Elder's health was in a very grave state. To the director's amazement, after partaking of Holy Communion, the Elder rose to his feet and was full of vigour. Chokhonelidze asked if he could shoot the Elder in one of the scenes – the icon-bearing procession around the church. The Elder agreed. In the scene, at the head of the procession Father Gabriel is carrying the Cross, sanctifying people by sprinkling holy-water in a processional marching around the church. Heghumene Ketevan and the nuns carrying the icons are chanting hymns. These sequences appeared to be the only ones commemorating the remarkable face of Father Gabriel.

The film director also asked Father Gabriel if he agreed to participate in a film dedicated to the arrival of the icon of the Iberian Holy Virgin (Portaitissa) to Georgia from Holy Mount of Athos. "Why not", he answered, "if you find other seven genuine monks." Transferring into his "salos" form, he asked with a smile: "How can I walk on the sea, I may fall down, if I am drunk." "Don't be afraid, we'll fix planks", said the director. Father Gabriel rose to his feet, knitting his brows: "What a monk is Father Gabriel if he can't walk on the sea and will need planks?"

Father Gabriel had a vision: God was holding a globe with a big cross on it. Father Gabriel asked: "How will people be saved before the Second Coming?"

"Through kind deeds and love" the Voice was heard.

Father Gabriel in tears addressed everyone coming to him with tears: "To be saved - hasten in almsgiving, give brotherly love. Half of Hell is already on the earth, the antichrist is at the door, he is not just knocking, he is breaking in. You will witness his reign. Persecutions will be everywhere, but Georgia will be protected by the Holy Virgin as Iberia had been chosen as Her lot.

When he was young, Father Gabriel tried to calculate the name of antichrist. He was entreating God. Suddenly, an angel appeared before him and said: The name has been concealed from human beings, but the fight between the prophets Enoch, Elias and antichrist will be shown on TV. When the icon of the Iberian Holy Virgin leaves Holy Mount, the event will be followed by bell ringing, and churches in a visible way will bow to commemorate the farewell. All this will be shown on TV, so

that the whole world could see it and come to Georgia, who want to save their souls.

Satan has set 666 traps. During the antichrist times, the strongest temptation will be anticipation of salvation from cosmos, from "humanoids", "extraterrestrials" that are actually masks of demons.

If someone had the antichrist seal impression made by force, in God's sight the person will be considered as virgin disgraced against her will. The seal won't have any effect, if made against one's will.

The Elder was asked if fate existed. No, he said. Someone may say, 'It was my fate'. But if his fate was to die and it was determined beforehand, why is he to be judged on the Day of Judgment? We create our fate ourselves. If a man out of his recklessness or stupidity puts his life at risk, what does it have to do with fate?

To a question if everyone will be saved, father Gabriel answered with tears: "No, my children, God is merciful but not to everyone, I wouldn't be able to help you unless you strive for your salvation. He who saves his soul and helps the neighbour by word or deed, fulfils the commandments of God."

Not long before his death, Father Gabriel pointed to the corner saying: "There is my death waiting for me. I have to leave and raise prayers before God to save you."

Two weeks before his repose, an icon of the Holy Facer was brought to him. On the icon Jesus Christ wears the crown of thorns. I said to the Elder that he would be cured by the icon, and reminded him that he felt better after the icon of the Holy Virgin had been placed in his cell. He shook his head: "Should it not be the crown of thorns, I would have been healed. It means I'll be dying in torments." The eyes of the Saviour on the icon were closed but after a while they opened. When I noticed it, he said: "You will know about my death three days before."

Three days before his death, I was reading Supplication entreaties of the Holy Virgin asking Her to cure the Elder. In my dream the Holy Virgin promised to cure him in three days. The next day I told about it to Father Gabriel and he asked me to talk to him all night so as to keep him in vigilance. I was talking to him all night but all of a sudden I fell asleep. When I woke up the Elder wasn't asleep, he rebuked me for my weakness. At four in the morning he kept calling me: "Mother,

Mother, Sister, Sister." Tears were rolling down his face. I knelt down. He blessed me, made the sign of the cross in all directions, blessing All Georgia, looked around the cell with love and started praying looking at Saint Nikolas icon. I had a feeling that all the cell was filled with invisible angels.

In the evening, His Eminence Daniel and Father Michael arrived and after the prayers for "the soul release" were read, the Elder departed quietly from his earthly life for Eternal Motherland shedding his loving smile upon us.

I couldn't understand what happened to me: instead of being heart-broken, I felt remarkable lightness, my heart was filled with love and happiness, there was no fear for death, it was rejoicing of Nativity and Resurrection.

Archpriest Neophitos (Davitashvili), Annunciation Churches of Ananuri and Mukhrani

I met Father Gabriel twice: first, when at Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino myrrh was gushing from the altar icons. I have prepared myself to see such a great miracle and have been stocked up with cotton wool to take some holy oil with me. But when I approached the icons, the fragrance was so deep that I forgot everything. I was witnessing great visible miracle sent by God. At the end of the iconostasis I saw the icon of the Holy Virgin with Child and holy oil was exuding from the Jesus palm. I approached the icon and touched it with my lips. I felt inexplicable sweetness, blissfulness and I was filled with heavenly joy. All this was infused into my body and remained with me for a year. After that my thoughts were concentrated on fear and repentance and I felt I needed someone to get absolving of my sins. With these thoughts, I left the temple and saw Father Gabriel. After a short talk, he led me into his cell in an old tower. The cell was filled with icons. It looked as if the Heavenly Kingdom descended on the earth. The Elder's abode was emitting divine radiance.

Inspired by abundant blissfulness within such a short period I talked without stopping. Father Gabriel was listening to me with meaning shining with joy. Now I understand he could foresee my future as a clerical, though at that time I could not even think about it.

Time passed. I was tonsured by His Beatitude Elias II. It was then for the second time that I met the Elder in one of the monasteries. There in public, Father Gabriel was denouncing and trampling down one clerical. His prophesies were so terrifying, that I was fear stricken. I couldn't imagine everything would happen with such a mathematical accuracy. Now that the clerical is in schism and nobody knows his whereabouts, I admit venerably that Father Gabriel really possessed God-blessed power of prophesy and sagaciousness.

Nun Ekatherine (Ebraldze)

Father Gabriel called me one day and said I had to paint an icon of Saint Saviour. I refused because my knowledge of iconography was very poor. However, he insisted. "Don't resist, Sister! Do whatever I tell you. I'll bring you now everything you need." I gave in.

I started working and all went so quickly I couldn't believe myself. Only the face of Saint Saviour looked rather strict and I told the Elder about it. "Don't worry, the icon looks exactly as I need", he consoled me. I was so happy that through my icon I could express my gratitude and love to my Lord.

Blessed by His Beatitude Elias II Daniel, the Metropolitan of the Tskhum-Abkhasian diocese took some nuns of Samtavro Convent to help the churches in Svaneti. We stayed there for a year. Father Gabriel didn't bless me to go to that high mountain region again because of my health. Father George from Svaneti visited our Convent. He had rather long talk with Father Gabriel on various subjects. When parting, Father Gabriel told Father George that he became his beloved archpriest. Then he turned to me saying: "Do you know who this priest is? If not for my leg, I would have gone to help him. Bless you to go and help them, I will take upon myself your weakness and pray for you." The Elder's prayers

were so fervent, that the God's blessing descended on Svaneti. Archpriest George always remembers Father Gabriel in his prayers and at the Divine Liturgy.

My mother, Schemanun Johanna, came to the Convent after she had undergone twice the surgery on her leg for sarcoma. The doctors' prognosis wasn't encouraging. The only confidence was placed on God. Father Gabriel foresaw my mother's state, he asked me how she was. I answered that she was not afraid of death and was calmly waiting for it. He started screaming: "Do you think she will be counted as a martyr? You as her daughter take responsibility for her health. Bless you to go today to His Beatitude and learn God's will from him."

His Beatitude blessed my mother for surgery and her leg urgently amputated Father Gabriel committed venerably to the earth of Samtavro Convent. As for Schemanun Johanna, by God's blessing and by Father Gabriel's prayers, she met the New Year 2000 in a good health.

Once Father Gabriel was sitting on a bench in the courtyard of the Convent. All of a sudden, a pretty woman, with too much make-up on her face, wearing pants, sat in his laps and started kissing him: "Father Gabriel, you are so handsome, I adore you, I want to come to you again"... The situation was so strange and unnatural, we were benumbed, with no idea what plot she had conceived. Father Gabriel also was petrified. By fixing his look on the sky, he was listening calmly her babbling without interrupting her. After a while he said: "Come, Makvala, come." Having heard her name, the woman as if emerged from sleep, jumped to her feet, looked at us, and moving backward, ran out.

We expected her to come the next day, and she did but it was quite different person having nothing to do with the previous one. She was wearing a black long skirt, her head was covered with a scarf, there was no make-up on her face. She approached Father Gabriel's cell shedding tears and wailing: "Father Gabriel, I know you will not open the door, I know I will never see you again, please forgive my shameless behavior. I feel your power, you have raised me from death and changed my life. Thank you for everything."

Such emotional scene made all of us weep. We were stunned seeing such an immediate change. Now I feel the Elder had performed a miracle, having cured the diseased person, bringing back the lost sheep.

I remembered one more detail. Before Makvala's visit, the Elder suddenly rose and went into his cell. He felt she was coming. After her first visit, he went to his cell warned everyone not to be disturbed and on his knees was entreating the Holy Virgin to save Makvala's soul.

The next day after the Divine Liturgy, Father Gabriel fell down at the threshold of the temple and hit his head getting a lump on his forehead. Four nuns managed with difficulty to drag him to his cell. Unable to lift him, we placed him on the floor. He was groaning from pain. We were scared. One nun stumbled and hit with her elbow some keys of the grand piano that was in his cell. Hearing the sounds, the Elder raised his head. Another nun suggested to hit the keyboard again to please the Elder. All of a sudden, Father Gabriel got up absolutely sound and said: "Play shalakho! (Georgian folk dance)" He threw up beautifully his hands in a dance, started singing and then weeping. "What happened to me? I have been defeated by the devil. Yesterday he was bombarding the piano with stones, I ordered him to vanish, he said he will make me dance on that piano and he did."

Father Gabriel never accepted praises, that is why after his miracles he used to take his "salos" form. We witnessed how he drove out evil spirits. Thanks to the Elder's prayers, the person was completely cured. But to erase the case from our memory Father Gabriel pretended as if he was trapped by demons. To conceal his power, he wanted to show us his weakness. And we believed. Some years later, the Lord enlightened us and we felt the Elder's wisdom.

Beloved Father Gabriel, pray before God to save our souls!





Nun Nana (Kutateladze)

I came to Saint Nino Convent of Samtavro on September 11th, on the day of beheading Saint John the Forerunner. My first deaconess was in the refectory. When Father Gabriel entered the refectory I was introduced to him as Heghumene Ketevan's niece, who wanted to stay at the Convent. The Elder looked at me pondering and said, "Who, this chanticleer, this chanticleer?" and he was repeating these words, until I ran out of the refectory weeping bitterly.

Father Gabriel didn't like to let the nuns leave the Convent. Once we left for some errands without his blessing. We were joking, laughing, we thought we managed to slip away and were out of the Elder's reach. When we thought we left him far away, all of a sudden he appeared before us to our great astonishment. We didn't know he possessed God blessed prophetic power and it was impossible to conceal anything from him. Though he said nothing, we saw fatherly care in his stern look.

I was washing dishes in the kitchen. Father Gabriel entered accompanied by Father Nickolas. I was glad to see them but I didn't talk to them as I was busy and had no blessing to talk to them. Father Nickolas was surprised and asked Father Gabriel, "Why does she have such an expression on her face?" I felt offended. Father Gabriel replied: "See her heart." His words consoled me.

Once I was in a state of confusion and without blessing I went out to visit my parents. In a bus I had a feeling of distress and started crying, but I was afraid to come back. At home I was welcomed heartily by my folk and we started talking. Gradually, our talk transferred into a dispute. I thought, "Monastic feats are better" and decided to go back, though I intended to stay three-four days at home. I made the cross sign as I approached the Convent. At the stairs I saw Father Gabriel strictly looking at me, he told me to come up to him. I thought he would start shouting. Patting my shoulder, his eyes filled with tears, he said: "My child, you know everyone loves you and should you not return, I

would have left the Monastery as well." His warm words encouraged me. It appeared that after I had left the Convent, he blessed all the nuns to read entreaty of Saint Nickolas, ensuring them everything would be all right. Of course, Father Gabriel raised his prayers and God heard them. Through Father Gabriel's God blessed power, we were led towards the light to perform God-pleasing deeds.

Nun Nino (Julakidze)

I had been craving for God since my childhood. As a small child, I liked to find a secluded place near the church in our village and think about God. Later I learnt that the church was named after Saint Andrew the First-Called.

Since 1989 I had been visiting regularly the Cathedral Church of Shemokmedi (Western Georgia). My spiritual father Archimandrite Nickolas (Glonti) blessed me to leave the job, I was the head of financial department but I couldn't do it as my parents objected. However the idea of getting rid of such a burden never left me. I had a dream: I was sitting and turning over papers with various vague figures that were confusing me... Suddenly at one page, I saw a very beautiful field of flowers with Saint Nino's cross resting on them.

With God's help, soon I left my work and after two years I was blessed by my spiritual father to go to the Convent. Every day I read entreaties of Saint Nickolas. As I didn't obey the blessing of my spiritual father in my dream, Saint Nickolas ordered me to go to Samtavro Convent, otherwise there would be the fatal end for my brother. First, he showed me the Cathedral Church of Svetitskhoveli, then Saint Nino Convent. As I woke up, I gave a solemn promise to obey the blessing and on the festive day of Saint Nickolas on May 22, 1993, I came to Saint Nino Convent of Samtavro and remained there till now.

The next day I saw Father Gabriel in front of the stairs at the belfry. On his chest he had an icon of Saint Saviour. The Elder was oddly dressed. I thought: "What an eccentric person!" By his look I understood he read my thoughts and it sent a shiver down my spine. I felt ashamed

for my thoughts. I was told it was Father Gabriel, sagacious clerical, a miracle-worker, who could foresee my future. Father Gabriel welcomed me devotedly and we had a long talk. Whatever he said, it comes true even today.

As blessed by Heghumene, I started my obedience from the refectory. Father Gabriel was our frequent visitor, he used to give us helpful advice in cooking. He said he prepared meals for Seminary students.

A few months later, a heavy trial pounced on my head. One of the nuns started uttering slanders on me trying to oppress me. I didn't tell it to anyone considering the reason lied in my sins. And also I didn't want to disturb my spiritual father with my complaints. Finally, the situation became so aggravated, that I decided to abandon the Convent, but nobody was informed about my decision.

It was time for prayers. Everyone was gathering in the church. I was walking alone. Father Gabriel met me at the stairs and whispered: "The enemy wants to drag off the grace from you. Be patient! Hold on!" I was astounded how he could perceive my thoughts. And I was still more surprised when Father Gabriel approached the slanderer and rebuked her. I glorified God and decided not to leave the Convent. Soon Father Gabriel's edifications gave fruits and my patience was rewarded. By His Beatitude I was blessed to wear the mantle with the name of Ketevan and after a year exactly on the festive day of Saint Nickolas, I was tonsured a nun and named Nino.

It was decided to send me to another Convent, but Father Gabriel opposed categorically. He warned me several times: "Don't leave this place, otherwise your grace will be taken away and you commit suicide." Soon he repeated the same words adding: "Stay close to Heghumene Ketevan or you will be ruined."

Unfortunately I was forced to leave the Convent but after 8 months I understood the Elder's warnings, I returned for fear of committing suicide. I said prayers in front of the Elder's door and as I entered, he exclaimed: "Since you have returned, there is nothing to worry about."

In his words I felt enormous care and I regreted because of my deed. I am sure he saw my ruin and raised prayers to save my soul.

A year after Heghumene Ketevan and the spiritual father of the Convent went on a pilgrimage to Ajara. This period seemed to last endlessly. There was no one to guide me. Father Gabriel was very weak and stayed in bed in his cell most of the time. Suddenly I decided to go to him and ask if it was possible to be saved in my case. He blessed me to enter after pronouncing the Jesus prayer. Strained calmness fell. The Elder was lying exhausted suffering from unbearable pain. I considered inappropriate to talk about my personal problems. A few minutes later, he broke silence and said: "Sister, live the way you live and no Heavenly Kingdom will be taken from you." I glorified God for giving father Gabriel the power to read my thoughts and it strengthened me deeply in my faith.

In 1995, in the Cathedral Temple of Svetitskhoveli the Georgian Church Council was convened. Father Gabriel called me from his tower during its session and pointing to Svetitskhoveli, he said: "Do you know, the Eighth Ecumenical Council is being held there now!"

I smiled. He asked me why I smiled and added: "Is there anywhere Orthodox except Georgia?!"

I stayed in Father Gabriel's cell till his last breath. Starting from morning, the clericals were reading the prayers "for soul release." In the evening, Metropolitan Daniel and the spiritual father of the Convent, Archimandritis Michael came. As the ninth canon of the Psalter was read, Father Gabriel looked at us with his fondling smile and his soul departed quietly to Heaven. His smile attracted everyone's attention - it was one more confirmation of the immortality of the soul.

Father Gabriel was an immaculate, chaste clerical, whose entreaties and prayers made with zeal and eagerness to the Holy Virgin, have saved my soul and I render my thanksgiving to God and to the bearer of His Divine Grace - Father Gabriel.



Nun Elizabeth (Zedgenidze)

Previously my knowledge of faith was limited to going to church only to lit a candle. But it happened so that by God's will my grandmother who lives in Paris, emigrant Iren Bagrationi, a true devotee, marked by religious ardour, psalm reader and choir chanter of Saint Nino church established by Saint Grigol (Peradze), invited me to visit France.

Because of the death of Archpriest Father Elias (Melia), the Divine Services were ceased temporarily. Before appointment of a new Archpriest - Father Archil (who performs services at present), my grandmother took me to a Greek Church. She was trying to strengthen my faith by confessing and partaking of Holy Communion. My grandmother asked the priest to receive the confession from me through an interpreter but the priest refused because of its confidentiality. We were just leaving when having learnt we were from Georgia (the news of the tragedy of the 9th of April has already spread all over the world, and the priest knew all about it), he said: "The Georgian people has shed so much blood for Christ, May God forgive me, I take upon myself all the sins of this girl from childhood till now so that she can receive the Holy sacrament."

So, after partaking of Holy Communion in Paris for the first time without confession I felt such a grace poured on me, that I decided to devote myself to Church. I informed my grandmother of my decision to return to Georgia immediately.

Everything went well at my work but I lost my peace of mind and did not know where to seek salvation. "My God, where is salvation?" I said and mechanically switched on TV. The Divine Liturgy was being translated with choir chants. I received a sign from God – my place was at the Convent. My friend suggested me going to the Convent of Samtavro where Metropolitan Daniel was performing the Morning Service. From his preach, I got all answers to my questions and I took a firm decision to choose monasticism.

I felt too shy to approach His Eminence. He gave me a sign to come up to him, and having found out everything about me, he said: "The Lord Himself has brought you here." I glorified God for bringing me through such a short way to the Convent, where I met a great

Confessor of our time - Archimandrite Gabriel. As I saw him for the first time at Samtavro, I couldn't tear myself away from him. I became devoted to him with all my heart and always was trying to be near him. All my free time I spent in his cell; I often took him to various places in my car. Closeness to him helped me to strengthen in spirit and faith.

Sitting quietly in his cell, he said: "Who knows how many wars await Georgia, how many misfortunes! You also have to undergo many trials." Suddenly he offered me some coffee. He took a very dirty cup, showed it to me, poured coffee and passed it to me. I felt disgust, how to drink from such a dirty cup, but love towards the Elder prevailed and I drank the coffee. "You really love me, love the Lord, go on like that and God will always be with you," he said. Since then we have become closer to each other.

It was Saturday morning. Father Gabriel said to me: "Let's assault the Jvari Monastery!" I got already used to his "salos" pranks. He blessed me to buy vodka, hid it under his mantle and with a serious countenance directed towards Jvari Monastery. He opened the bottle, sipped from it and passed it to me. I took a sip and felt as if I drank water. He offered the bottle to everyone around asking to take a sip and commented: "Look, nobody blamed me, they all will reach the Heavenly Kingdom." I thought the performance came to an end. But no! Father Gabriel turned to me with a serious face and said: "Sit down, extend your hand and beg alms." When enough money was collected, he invited everyone around for meals; as for himself, he even didn't touch the food. He concluded such an unusual meal with the following words: "Everyone who humbles himself will be exalted."

When in Georgia political rallies were held everyday, the Elder said unexpectedly: "Let's go. I have to calm them down." He made his way through the crowd of infuriated women and started preaching. In a while negative emotions faded away.

We were preparing for a long trip. Father Gabriel standing in front of my car and blocking it, said: "Don't go, you may die in an accident." Despite his warning, we left. And there was an accident: a car coming from the opposite direction hit our car with such force that we flew down into the 16 m deep ravine. It was a miracle that we remained

alive. "I was praying so much to save you from death", said Father Gabriel when we returned.

He recalled: "When I was a small child, I wanted very much to pay homage to the grave of Saint Anthony of Martkop. I went on foot. It was a long way, I felt so hungry I was dreaming to have a piece of bread and a jug of water. I fell down exhausted. When I opened my eyes, above my head there was a man who gave me some bread, water and disappeared. When I reached the Monastery, I saw the icon of Anthony of Martkop. I recognized the man, who had brought me bread and water. It was Saint Anthony. I always dreamed to pay homage to his grave and render thanks." Unfortunately, he couldn't fulfill his wish, partially I blame myself for it, for not finding time to take the Elder there.

May God forgive us all our transgressions! We were unable to fully appraise his merits, to show attention and reverence towards such a remarkable God blessed ascetic.



Nun Thekla (Oniani)

As blessed by His Eminence Dimitrios (Shiolashvili) and my spiritual Father Vassili (Kikvadze), I came to Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino in 1994 to see my friend Mariam. She led me towards the tower and said: "This is the abode of the sagacious Elder." I thought he might be in deception. A few days later, nun Paraskeva brought me to Father Gabriel (he stayed in bed because of the fracture in his leg). I was nervous and I didn't know how to behave but as soon as I saw the Elder, I understood he knows everything and there is no need to explain anything. Everyone seemed to be plunged in thoughts for a while. Nun Paraskeva broke silence asking the Elder if I would stay at the Convent. Father Gabriel ordered strictly: "Come and kneel down." I immediately obeyed and as I took a quick look at him I was astounded: his face was beaming with radiant light. He asked me if I wanted to be a nun. I said: "No." I never considered seriously my future in monasticism, though I liked it in general. Father Gabriel shook his head sadly and said, "Half of the earth has become Hades, the world is burning..." His words etched for ever in my mind. Nun Paraskeva repeated her question. Father Gabriel looking at me for quite a long time, said: "It is not always good to know in advance what will happen to you."

Now I understand his words, should he say: "She will stay at the Convent", I would have run away as I wasn't ready for monastic life then. He gave me a chance to make a decision myself and bear responsibility for my choice made.

During the midnight prayers the following thoughts inflicted my mind: "Do you want to spend all your life in getting up at midnight and praying till morning, and then toil all day without respite? You are so young, you are ruining yourself, have you gone mad?" Returning to the cell in the morning, I saw Father Gabriel. He was weeping, "So beautiful, so young! To rise at midnight, to pray... Are you going to stay here?"

He shocked me. He was repeating the whole train of my thoughts. I felt ashamed: it was God's blessing that I could follow the holy steps of Saint Nino at the holy place. How could I admit such thoughts? Only after a few years I understood Father Gabriel's wisdom, his help and support. Since then such thoughts have never disturbed my mind.

After morning prayers I felt very tired and wanted to sleep. I walked towards my cell. On the road I met Father Gabriel with beaming face: "Running to do a job by obedience? Good!" he exclaimed. All of a sudden all my desire to sleep vanished and I started my work by obedience with such a zeal that I didn't feel tiredness the whole day.

Father Gabriel always avoided praises. His words like a sparkle lit faith in the hearts of those who strayed or had little faith; but afterwards his behavior was aimed at concealing his merits. Being next to him, I always felt his fatherly care. He referred to my mother with the following blessing: "In your generation there was a fervent prayer who brought your daughter to God. Pray for her, the mother's prayers move the mountains."

The Elder was always glad to see us toiling. Once he was looking at us with such deep devotion that my face expressed sensual gratification. He started waving his hands mumbling something to divert our mind.

One day a photographer came to the Convent to take a group photography. The Elder was sitting on a small chair and there was another small chair next to him. I was standing behind him thinking what luck to have a common photo with him. Father Gabriel turned his face to me and pointing to the chair said: "Sit down." Nobody seemed to be happier in the world than me at that moment.

The Elder was not feeling well: he had pulmonary hemorrhage. We called a doctor. A nun took the blood pressure, it was too low. I was checking his pulse and saying to myself: "Everything will be all right, Father Gabriel". He looked at me as if he felt better. When the doctor appeared, the Elder said he felt better and did not need the doctor's assistance any more.

Father Gabriel used to teach us: "If your neighbour is in need help, console him, say prayers with contrite heart and the Lord will hear your prayers and forgive him. This is the aim of our creation – to give out as much as possible." This way the Elder was strengthening my faith.

I was planning to go on some errands. I was sure I will manage to do everything within a short time period. Blessing me, he said: "God's blessing and His Divine Grace be with you!" and then added: "Solomon's

wisdom!" I understood, Father Gabriel perceived my haughty thoughts and reminded me: "Man supposes, God disposes."

I brought my aunt to the Elder's cell. Father Gabriel was very weak, he opened his eyes with difficulty and blessed her in a whisper. Even when he was very sick, we never heard him saying: "I can't."

The Elder suffered very much whenever someone left the Convent. He was saying: "Even if one nun abandons the Convent half of its grace is taken from it."

Time passed. Father Gabriel is no longer with us. I grieved deeply his loss, since I couldn't learn anything from him; when he was alive, I didn't show due appreciation for his merits. I had a feeling of bitterness. But when I saw my icon in his cell, I felt such consolation that I became certain that spiritually he will never leave us, he will always raise his prayers before God to save us.

For us, the mortals, it is difficult to perceive love of God so as to see in every human being His image; to pray for those who not only dislike us but insult us is rather difficult and the Elder was able to do it.

I render my thanks to God for giving me a chance to be with such a remarkable Elder, who guided me over a hard but blissful monastic path.

Nun Nino (Peikrishvili)

I was baptised on the feast day of Saint Anthony of Martkop. Hieromonk, who baptised me, said: "When she grows up, she will pray for us."

I grew up and started seeking for God. I had a dream: I was flying over almond blooming sky, collecting books written in an unknown for me language (old Georgian). The meaning of the dream was disclosed to me later.

My neighbour asked me to baptize her child who was dying. The priest was holding the book with unknown for me letters, it was the book I saw in my dream. Having seen my astounding look, the priest

held out the book and said: "Read, God will teach you." It was the Book of Psalms.

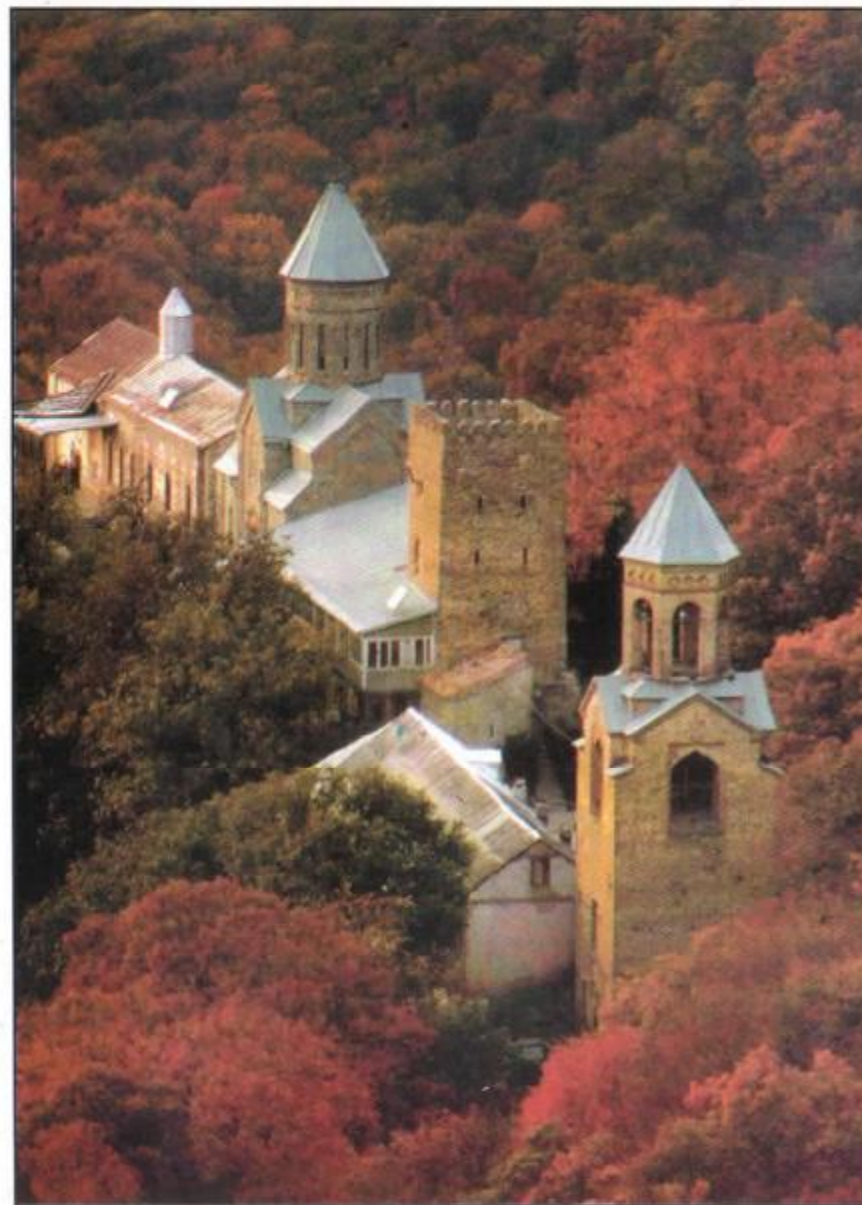
As the psalm reader didn't come to the Church of Holy Trinity I was told to read. It was the day when Father Gabriel visited our church. By his smile he expressed approval for my skills of reading psalms. He blessed me and I felt my heart filled with Divine Grace.

During the horrible communist regime churches were destroyed, clericals were persecuted. However, there were also people who called themselves Christ's servants. They were fearlessly preaching veritable God, encouraging and strengthening the fellow Christians in faith. Among them were women. Nino Khatiasvili (subsequently the mother of six children – choir chanters and iconographers) proclaimed in the church: "Christ is a veritable God! Each of us bears the God's image! Sisters and Brothers, trust in God, crucified on the Holy Cross for our salvation, don't destroy churches!" Police came to break up the crowd but they couldn't do anything with Nino. Lying on the ground with extended hands, she went on her speech. Father Gabriel addressed the policemen: "Earthly angels, is it our fault that you can't see God? Give us a chance to glorify Him." Confused, the policemen left the church saying "Everyone calls us dogs, he refers to us as angels."

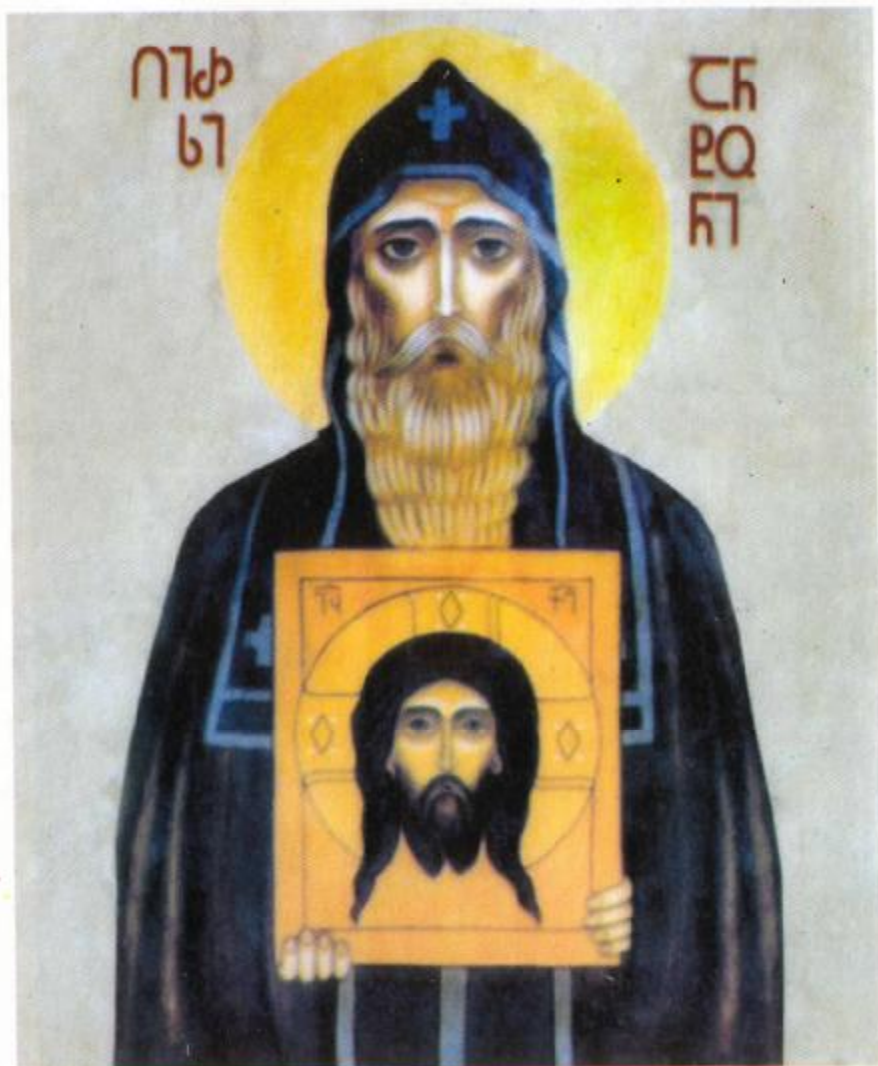
After such meetings we used to return to my house in Sagarejo for making future plans. I asked Father Gabriel to sanctify my house. Having seen the priest, the boys playing at our house started crying: "Hey, Blackcoat! Blackcoat!" Father Gabriel raising his hands in dance and lifting the hem of his robe was shouting "I'll show you chanticleers!" The boys stay dumb-founded. Having exchanged glances: "He is not normal", they ran away. When I asked Father Gabriel why he did so, he said there was no other way to get rid of them.

By the blessing of His Eminence Constantine, I often stayed with Father Gabriel. We visited ruined churches, Father Gabriel performed services and I helped him. This way we were making pilgrimage almost over all ruined churches of Georgia.

As blessed by my spiritual father I came to the Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino. Though the Convent was in hiding, thanks to Father Gabriel, the daily circle of services never interrupted. Father Gabriel



Monastery of St. Anthony of Martkop (one of the thirteen Syrian fathers who arrived in Georgia to support and enlarge the Monastic life). 6th century



St. Anthony of Martkop

constantly performed services. Heghumene Anna (Achaidze) showed special veneration towards the Elder.

Once while I was reading the Akathist Hymn to the Holy Virgin, the book dropped from my hands. I startled, made a bow and continued reading. Again the book fell out of my hands and I heard a voice:

“Run quickly to Father Gabriel!” I thought it was the voice of evil. Having sprinkled all around with holy water, I continued reading. And again the voice repeated the same. I put down the Book, went out, took a taxi and hastened to Father Gabriel’s house. I pronounced the Jesus prayer at his door, but there was no answer. I ran into the church and saw Father Gabriel lying in front of Saint George’s icon making death-rattling sounds. I unclasped his teeth with a wooden spoon and he started to breathe. I dragged him out. It was famine, hard time, fasting period. The Elder was exhausted by excessive abstaining from food. I could hardly distinguish his words: “Start reading the 90th psalm, take me to your house.”

He stayed with us quite a long time. It was the happiest period for my family. We loved to listen to his teachings. Father Gabriel was the clerical whose words were encouraging and strengthening in faith.

Nun Theodora (Bolkvadze)

In the summer of 1984, we came to Father Gabriel with blessings, gifts, food and money from His Beatitude Elias II. I heard the Elder had a gift for reading thoughts and it was impossible to hide anything from him. For a long time I cherished hopes to see the Elder and was very happy to have such a chance.

We were told that neither Father Gabriel nor his guests were among the favourites for his neighbours. That’s why we passed through the yard with special caution. When I saw the church built by himself, the Cross, the Belfry I was amazed by its beauty and by such an enormous number of icons. I thought, “Where from could the Blessed Elder get so many icons?” And he answered immediately: “Do you know where from? When wicked men were discharging piles of icons with dump-

trucks, I was collecting and bringing them here." I understood he could read thoughts.

When the Elder learnt we had brought gifts from the Patriarch, he exclaimed: "Thank you merciful Lord, you know I have neither money, nor food!" Then he turned to us saying: "I haven't had anything to eat for several days. I made a mistake asking my neighbours to give me some food - they cursed me. I was crying in my cell. How could people be so cruel and intolerant! Is it possible to consider a man a scoundrel because he loves God? I felt sorry for my weakness. When I remembered Jesus Christ had passed the road of humiliation and insult, humbled himself and became obedient to death - even death on the cross! It sobered me up. And here you are!"

Father Gabriel laid the table and asked us to join the feast. He filled our glasses with wine and proposed toasts. As for himself, he was neither eating nor drinking. I thought: "He is hungry..." and he immediately answered: "Love is what I need more than food and wine." Afterwards he told us in detail how he had burnt a portrait of Lenin and how ruthlessly he had been treated by the police. He said to them: "You will demolish the monuments to Lenin with your own hands and will arrange the gardens there. My injured body was hurting me horribly but my soul was rejoicing as I did something that a real Christian was entitled to do. I knew I would be released from prison soon. And I was set free in seven months."

Georgia loves the Elder - Archimandrite Gabriel. Before, his fellowmen used to visit him at his cell at Samtavro, now they pay homage to his burial place and the Elder raises his prayers for his people, for his Motherland, for peace all over the world.



Nun Pelagia (Ksovreli)

Multiple misfortunes brought me to the Convent of Samtavro. One of my four children, Manana, at the age of three used to run to the corner of the room and stay there for 15-20 minutes saying prayers. She was doing it every day exactly one and the same time. It made me start fasting. When I was fasting, the child was feeling well, whenever I failed, she was feeling so bad, almost dying.

My second daughter was born with congenital heart disease. I was begging God to give health to my child and made an oath to do whatever His Will be. I don't know what my life will be if not for Father Gabriel. I knew the Elder since childhood. He was called then by his father's name - Vasiko. He was my brother's friend and they served together in the army in Batumi.

He was clearing the church ruins, as he explained to us, it was God's will. Vasiko was lifting a huge clod, when my uncle, a sportsman, was passing by. Vasiko asked him for help. My uncle was doing his best but he couldn't lift even a single clod. He was surprised: "I hardly moved a big clod while this boy was scattering them like pebbles." For my uncle as well as for many others, Father Gabriel remained unsolved mystery.

In the Convent of Samtavro, the Elder drew up the nuns in one line, gave the nun Ketevan a bowl and blessed her to wash all the nuns' hands and then to drink the dirty water. The nun Ketevan obeyed his blessing. Everyone was surprised how she could do it and didn't vomit. But afterwards the Elder kissed her on the forehead and blessed the other nuns. At that time the Convent didn't have Heghumene. Everyone understood by doing this, the Elder showed that the nun Ketevan was worthy to carry such a heavy burden. Then he prostrated at the entrance of the refectory and demanded that everyone should leave the refectory by stepping over his chest. Though confused, everyone obeyed.

Soon disturbances started in the Convent, nobody wanted to obey the new Heghumene. Having removed her cross, the Heghumene offered it to anyone who wanted to manage the Convent the way they wished. She retreated to her cell and didn't appear for meals. When Father Gabriel noticed she was not at the table, he cried out in anger:

"Where is the Heghumene? Have you ever heard meals at the Convent without the Heghumene's blessing?" And he demanded to summon her urgently. First she didn't intend to come, however finally she gave in. She came without her cross. Father Gabriel demanded to bring it urgently. He put the cross on her saying: "You must know: the first time the cross was given to you by God and put on you with Patriarch's hand, the second time – with my hand. Remember! You have no right to remove the cross!" After the incident, agitations in the Convent ceased and it seemed that there was no one who claimed to have priority for carrying the Heghumene's cross.

Once Father Gabriel slapped me violently in front of everyone. Only afterwards I understood the reason – he wanted to show how difficult the monastic life is. At night, on his knees he was asking for forgiveness. I also knelt down beside him. Hugging each other, we were weeping and smiling happily at the same time. I felt my heart filled with grace. It was difficult for a lay-man to interpret his behavior, but it was the way to reveal weaknesses of his spiritual children.

He said to me: "Let's move to the altar." I was standing at the altar, he went inside the Sanctuary and stayed there saying his prayers for quite a long time. All of a sudden, he ran out with a cry: "Myrrh gushing from the icons!" I saw altar icons covered with holy oil giving off remarkable fragrance. I understood Father Gabriel was entreating fervently anticipating the miracle. The holy oil had been exuding for one month. When everyone got used to it and there was no more veneration towards the miracle, it ended.

At the Convent the ceremony of bishop's consecration was being performed. During the Divine Liturgy the Elder started talking, making noise, interrupting the service. Everyone tried to endure his tricks patiently, but when standing next to the Bishop to be consecrated the Elder told him he didn't deserve the title it was the Elder who deserved it, he was blessed by the Metropolitan to be drawn out of the temple. When two novices approached him to draw him out, he managed to add: "You didn't understand my words." Time passed and the Bishop consecrated abandoned the church.

Not a single word uttered by the Elder was a mere trifle. It always concealed a certain meaning. By drawing spiritual grace, he acquired

prophetic gift and could foresee events. As for external side – the public opinion, it was not important for him.

Nun Nana (Agladze)

Living in the world I learnt there was a sager – Elder Gabriel at the Convent of Samtavro. One day I went to see him.

I liked monastic life, but I found it difficult to part with my worldly life. The Elder having seen my duality, squeezed firmly my head, blessed me with love and all my doubts vanished. With the Elder's help, I remained at the Convent. I was trying to be always with him and in the church I was standing next to him.

My first obedience was to clean and wash the floor. Whenever the Elder saw me toiling, he encouraged me: "Your salvation is in physical labour."

Once I felt my thoughts were preoccupied by vainglory. Though I knew it was from evil, I accepted it. When I came to the Elder for blessing, he started shouting: "She is good for nothing! Kick her out!" Being humiliated I went out, and my thought of vainglory disappeared immediately. The next day, when I was passing by the Elder's cell, I heard him exclaiming: "Why, the Roman Pope Himself came to me, the sinner, for blessing!" I understood the storm calmed down. The next time he said to me: "All trials are admitted by God and given to test us."

Edifying the nuns to keep constant memory of death, the Elder blessed to carry from time to time in front of the sisters the coffin prepared for himself.

The Elder always strengthened us in our faith and taught us: "Obedience is the inextinguishable God-pleasing light."

His prophesy – I would stay at Tsageri Convent has come true.



Martha Tarkhnishvili (Saingilo)

It was late autumn, 1991. After Vespers at the Zion Cathedral Church, I returned home. I haven't eaten anything for the whole day. I was working on the church chronicles for Patriarchy all night. Then I started reading preparation prayers for Holy Communion. The day was breaking. At 8 o'clock I was planning to go to the Patriarchy and then to attend Service in a new temple of Saint Vakhtang Gorgasali, where His Beatitude Elias II was to perform Divine Liturgy.

Though it was not worth while even to have a nap, all of a sudden feeling very tired I fell fast asleep and saw a dream: the lecture-room at the University was empty. I was taking an exam in Antique Literature. I took a ticket and walked towards the Chairman. "Tell us about catharsis", I heard the voice of the lecturer. When I lifted my head, I saw Zviad Gamsakhurdia. I was thinking and repeating "catharsis"... Then all of a sudden stretching out my hands, I exclaimed: "Catharsis is His Beatitude, the Patriarch!" The auditorium disappeared and I found myself at the Patriarchy under the bower of vines. I looked above and saw pure water pouring from above. I felt my heart beating rhythmically as I awoke. I took my case and went to the Patriarchy and we went to Rustavi with other nuns. The compulsive idea of my dream about the University, Patriarchy was disturbing my mind all the way. The Rustavi temple was full of congregation. After the Divine Liturgy His Beatitude preached of Georgian king and saint Vakhtang Gorgasali as well as the history of Rustavi. I felt I needed something to find out and I was not in a hurry. Usually I confessed to my spiritual father Metropolitan Daniel but I wanted to confess to Father Gabriel at least once.

I took a bus and came to Tbilisi. As I entered the Zion Cathedral Church I saw Father Gabriel saying prayers with his hands lifted. On his left, he made two persons kneel down. I was afraid to come closer to him: what if he does the same with me and there were so many acquaintances around. All of a sudden, he turned round and hugged me firmly. We were overwhelmed by feelings, tears were shedding over our faces. I was confessing without uttering a word, and he was listening. Then the Elder said: "I knew you would come. Listen to me, you have



Saingilo. Kurmukhi



The icon of St. George the Victorious

fifty percent of grace, keep it cherished, you have to acquire the other fifty percent. You will encounter many difficulties. Don't be afraid, God is with you." He took me by hand firmly, we passed through the crowd and sat on a bench of the choir. He asked me: "Are you hungry? Poor girl, you haven't eaten anything for two days. Fried fish and lavash (Georgian flat bread) would not be bad now." The Elder asked the attendant Maria (now the nun Euphraxia) to bring some food. "I'm afraid there is nothing left, there were the Seminary students", she said. "Go and fetch the food, I know there must be some" insisted the Elder. Soon Mariam fetched us some food on a tray. Father Gabriel passed me some fish and lavash, breaking off tiny pieces for himself, pretending he was eating too. Our feast was shared with the others. Everyone around was fed.

Then he turned to me and asked: "Now tell me, what you are doing"? I thought he asked the question just to say something. I said: "Nothing particular." "How is that?" He continued raising his voice: "And the informational data for the Patriarchy? Tell me, exactly what you are doing?" I answered: "His Beatitude blessed me to collect some materials for chronicles." "Kartlis Tskhovreba" (Annals of Kartli) has already been written, what else can be added?" Looking into my eyes he said: "Take care after the Catholicos, cathar"... not completing the word "catharsis" he repeated again "take care after the Catholicos."

Everything was revealed, he knew everything including my dream. In front of me there was a great ascetic, gifted by divine grace, wise "salos" in shabby clothes pouring out invincible faith with heavenly joy.

Ketevan Surmava

I wanted to write short reminiscences of Father Gabriel but I couldn't bring myself to do it. I decided to write it after I had read the passage from the book of the great Hagiorite of the 20th century - Father Paisios the Athonite: "The sacred duty of generations is to describe the divine warfare of holy fathers in their feats to approach God. When we write about them, we get benefit from these

reminiscences and try to follow their example. And holy fathers are rejoicing and come to our help.”

Father Gabriel's life was a sacrificing warfare led to gain the Holy Spirit, since it is the man's only treasure. Having gathered such spiritual riches the Elder became an inexhaustible source of God's Grace.

The Elder standing firmly on a thorny path was leading his fellowmen towards God. The great ascetic's edifications were intended to pass on them love, kindness, obedience, humbleness, repentance that he himself possessed in abundance.

The Elder loved everyone and felt compassion for them equally without exception. Whatever he said was aimed to save the soul. For me, an ordinary person, he spent so much time and energy, that I was stupid enough to think I was chosen. But for Father Gabriel everyone was chosen and he generously gave his love and attention to everyone. He knew everyone's weak points and the means how to mend them. It seems to me he was very close to God.

Time flies. Several years passed already since the Elder has left us. But we still feel his support any time, any place, whenever kneeling down at his grave or looking at his photo we ask him intercede with God for us. The photo of the Elder placed together with icons of saints emits warmth, love and peace. Those, who come to Father Gabriel with faith, always get consolation.

I have three icons made by the Elder given to me as a gift. They fill my house with grace.

The one who can lead the life according to the Elder's edifications, will be met and hugged in the Heavenly Kingdom by our beloved Father.

Elder Paisios the Hagiorite says: “The monk is like a light-house erected on a cliff that by its radiance illuminates seas and oceans guiding ships to reach the harbour safe and sound. And such a light-house is God-gifted Elder Gabriel guiding us towards God.



Otar Nikolaishvili

Overwhelmed by lustful desires, I was looking for my beloved one, who hiding from me, found a shelter at the Convent of Samtavro. I was furious (May God forgive me!). I was ready for any reckless deed, even to commit a crime. How could I listen to the word of reason with my disturbed mind. When I encountered Father Gabriel, he introduced himself as a sinful monk, with empty stomach, abused and abandoned by everyone. When he learnt the reason of my visit, he said: “God loves you, since He brought you directly to me. Don't worry. I will help you to settle your problems. Trust me. I'm a great master in match-making. There are more than enough devotees here. Everything will be all right. Now let's go to my cell and join me in partaking of the bread if you don't mind sharing some bread with such a sinner as me!”

I thanked God. Being an arrogant, in a state of rapture, I thought: “It's true, God loves me, since I met such a sinful and feeble-minded monk who without any trouble settles all my problems.” How could I imagine that in a while I will be reined by the “crazy” Elder and soon will abandon not only my beloved one but my inclination to multiple sins.

Just like a skillful fisher draws to land a fish caught on fishing line giving no chance to break loose from its line by drawing and loosing it, Father Gabriel was drawing me out of the swamp putting me firmly on the road of faith and repentance.

Father Gabriel was an example of genuine spiritual father. In order to understand fully the whole depth of his spiritual power, it was necessary to be close to him for several months neglecting his odd actions. Staying with him, I was learning more and more about his merits and my impression of him was changing gradually. First, I felt sorry for him as a poor and crazy monk; then I was glad of his compassion and understanding. Soon after I was surprised at how the odd monk could know the Old and New Testaments almost by heart. I knew more knowledge brings more damage to the mind and felt sorry for him. After a certain time, I noticed he answered my questions, though I never uttered a word. He could read thoughts. I was puzzled by the fact and frightened – what power was in front of me. Soon I understood

it was the power of prayers and love that could tame not only a sinful man but the most ferocious lion.

The blessed father possessed the God gifted power of wisdom but he concealed it in a masterly way. I couldn't understand why. How many times I tried to prove the people he was a wise man with prophetic gift but nobody believed me. So many times I was convinced that Father Gabriel was a great ascetic abiding within himself abundant love, wisdom and obedience. I was ready to show implicit obedience of all his commands. The most important for me was to be close to him.

Once at a market place he ordered me to kneel down and stay with my head bowed on a pile of water-melon crusts until he blessed me to rise. I saw the legs of the passers-by. The people must be looking curiously at me. Probably they wondered what this crazy man was doing kneeled down on the garbage.

Though I accepted all the words uttered by the Elder irresistibly, one of his blessings made me deeply puzzled. He said: "Now we'll go to the Monastery of Saint Anthony of Martkop in your car." It was impossible as my car needed repair. I tried to explain it to the Elder, but all of a sudden broke off. "Let it be as the Elder says", I thought. We started. I was sure that at the first slope upgrade, the car would break and we'll be forced to pass the night in the forest. Unexpectedly, Father Gabriel raised his hands and warned me not to look back as Saint Anthony of Martkop was in the car. I was so frightened that my hair stood on end. I wanted to look back but he warned me strictly: "Look ahead and hold firmly the steering-wheel!" The car that was hardly moving, all of a sudden made a jerk and moved with such an accelerated speed, that I was maneuvering hysterically over the bends and the damaged road. I had a feeling it was a jet propelled aircraft. As I thought to cast a look at the back seat the Elder warned me again not to look back.

Bursting into the church yard the car stalled. We were met with devotion and reverence by the Archpriest of the Monastery father Joseph (Kikvadze) and invited for meals. From the courtyard of the Monastery we heard cries of fellow-men from the neighbouring village. They were brawling, uttering threats against the monks. As I turned to meddle in, the Elder making a sign stopped me. He approached them with his hands stretched out and proclaimed: "If you are taking vengeance

by blood feud, shoot me! Take my blood, the monk Gabriel's, don't touch the others. If you kill me, God will forgive you, but if you kill them, you will never be forgiven!"

It appeared the trouble-makers knew the brotherhood of the Monastery but when they saw an old unknown monk, they looked confused. Gradually they calmed down, some of them even asked for forgiveness.

This way the Elder could foresee the danger and hastened to help. Saint Anthony of Martkop blessed the Elder to protect the Monastery from misfortunes.

His Eminence Thadeus recalled: "I saw Father Gabriel was holding an exposed electric wire in his hands, the spark was flashing from the contacts but the Elder remained unharmed."

His Eminence Joseph remembered: "In the Monastery of Saint Shio of Mgvime before the All-Night Vigils, nobody could open the doors of the Temple. The Elder made the sign of the cross at the doors and they were opened by light touch."

Father Gabriel used to fix his eyes on the shining sun just as we looked at the moon. When he was asked how he managed to do it, he replied: "That's nothing. It's more difficult to contemplate the Creator of the Sun."

Once Father Gabriel took a small chair and sitting in the middle of the street with intensive traffic started to talk with the pedestrians. It was amazing - while the Elder was talking with people not a single car appeared in the street, as soon as he rose, the traffic resumed.

It was Lent, together with the Elder we were at the Svetitskhoveli Cathedral Church. At night I felt an acute kidney pain. I didn't want to disturb the Elder and went to the hospital. The doctors gave me some pain killing drugs. On the fourth day, Father Gabriel visited me. Due to unbearable pain I couldn't move. He blessed me to kneel and say the Lord's prayer. I obeyed and felt the pain ceasing. By the grace of God and entreaties of Father Gabriel to the Holy Virgin, I was saved from surgery.

Another time the Elder shocked me by his request to bring some glamorous pornographic magazine "vigorous as a struggling fish." A few days later, when I came back hoping Father Gabriel forgot about

it, the first thing he asked me was the magazine. When he learnt I hadn't brought it, he kicked me out saying: "If you don't bring it, you will be punished very strictly."

I had no choice and I brought him the magazine. Having learnt about it, the brotherhood started condemning the Elder. I considered myself to be blamed for it. All of a sudden, it struck me – my lustful sin was imprinted on the photos that were kept in a safe with my documents at my work. When I opened the safe, I found the photos, in which I was in bed with two girls and on the table there was a plate with "vigorous" fish. I burnt the photos and a few days later for some reason, a search of my safe was conducted by a law-enforcement agency, and should those photos be there, I would have had lots of troubles. This way the Elder saved me from all troubles with no care about his own reputation. He was ready to accept any slander in order to save the neighbour.

It was a period when I was disturbed by thoughts of leaving the Elder, as if someone was whispering in my ear. The Elder told me I was attacked by strong evil power and there was a threat of being ruined.

I was sitting in Father Gabriel's cell, the Elder was dozing. Looking at him I thought "Who is this man who knows everything about everyone? May be he is a demon wearing a monk's mantle?" The Elder responded immediately: "Accepted." Even in his brief sleep he was reading thoughts. When Father Gabriel rose and looking at me started weeping loudly, I felt ashamed. He pointed to the crumbs on the table: "Without God's will demon can't move even these crumbs, to say nothing of putting on the monk's mantle."

A few days after our first meeting, Father Gabriel gave me a gift – a big old icon of Crucifixion. At night he took me out of the cell. The view was fantastic: under the moonlight the dome and cross were adorning the temple. I was kneeled down, the icon was put on my head and I heard the Elder's prayers for quite a long time. His voice was calling: "God of Abraham, God of Isaac, God of Jacob..." Till now it is mystery for me what he was entreating God for so long.

Another time he gave me a censer saying: "Remember, you will be tonsured at Zedazeni and you will end your earthly life there."

Though I haven't yet reached the spiritual state of a monk, I wish his words come true to justify Father Gabriel's confidence and his efforts and toils with respect to me.

If the edifier of humbleness, obedience and love, the consoler of sinners and the feeble "salos" Archimandrite Gabriel referred to himself: "I am a worm, earth and dust", what words could I find for myself when a very tiny sparkle lights in my heart and very rarely too.



Lia Kobachishvili

Living in a close vicinity with Father Gabriel, we frequently met each other. When he started talking, his first words were "I am stupid."

My husband asked him to give us one of his numerous icons that he found on dumps and restored. Father Gabriel was very pleased. Soon we heard his steps accompanied by singing. Father Gabriel entered the room holding over his head a large icon of Saint Saviour with in an icon-casing. He venerably placed the icon in a place chosen by himself and blessed our family saying: "The icon of Saint Saviour has arrived in your house and God's blessing be with you. Don't trouble the icon by multiple requests, ask whenever in need." I hear distinctly his words even now.

Our family have been living without any troubles for twenty years. All of a sudden, one of my daughters fell seriously ill. Her state was so grave, the doctors considered it hopeless. I was saying prayers as I could. First I asked the doctors to perform an operation, promising not to have any claims in case of fatal outcome, then I even started threatening. I don't know what made them perform surgery: my requests or my threats. For three days my daughter was unconscious, then she came to herself and asked for a glass of water. My daughter remained alive. When I came up to the icon of Saint Saviour, I saw a miracle: always closed, the icon-case was opened. I thanked God by kneeling down. To my regret, I couldn't recall the man, who had brought us the icon.

Several years passed and we suffered another misfortune. My other daughter couldn't give birth in natural way and needed cesarean section. I went home in extreme distress. When I came up to the icon, again I saw the icon-case was opened. I understood that merciful God will save us again. When I went to the maternity home, my daughter gave birth to a child without problems. Again to my shame and regret, I didn't remember Father Gabriel, though I know God's blessing was given to us through Father Gabriel's prayers.

Maia Chanturia

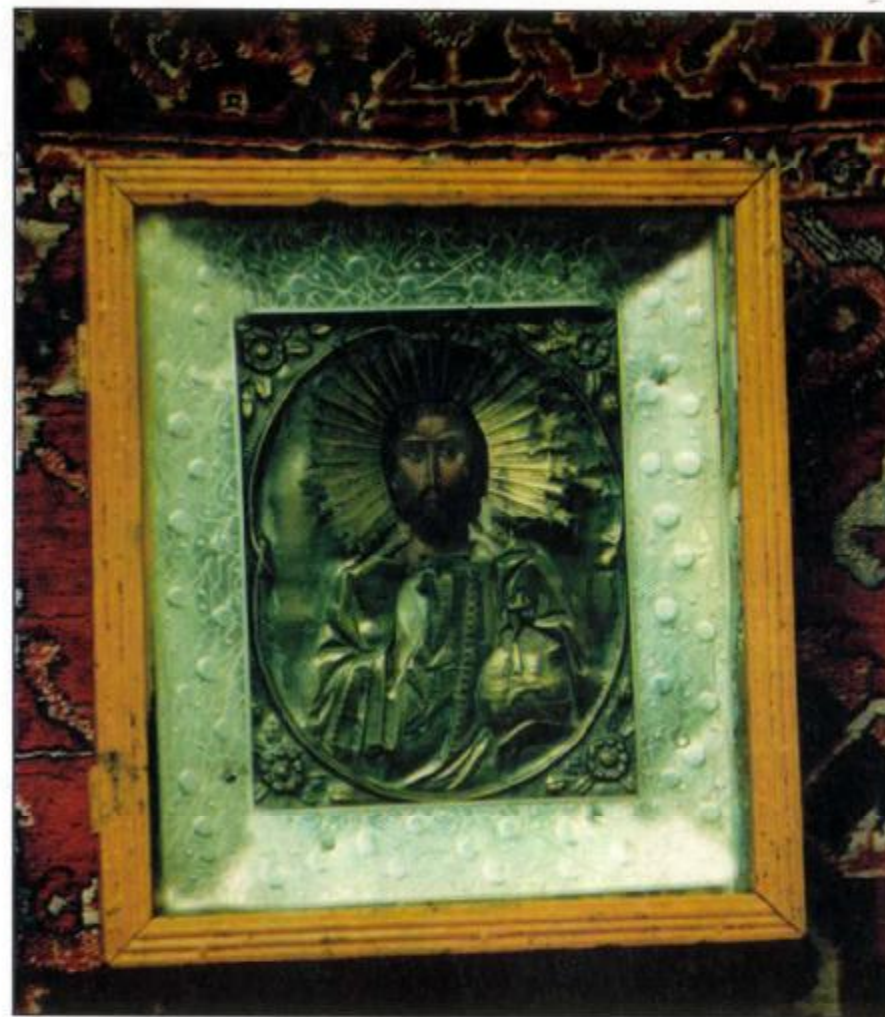
The following letter was written by the blessings of Metropolitan Daniel (Datuashvili) and my spiritual father Archpriest Vladimir (Shibaev)

Mother Superior, Heghumene Ketevan!

Long time has passed since we left Georgia and it is natural we miss everything concerned with our beloved Motherland. We are spiritually strengthened by the blessings of the Russian church of Saint Nicholas.

Due to multiple temptations of my son Gabriel, I requested God to reveal me a saint from Georgia bearing the same name as my son, whom I could refer with a request to save my child.

I saw a dream I was in the Monastery of Odeli that is in the same district where I live in Alsace. Together with two ladies from our congregation we were standing in front of a shop-window where icons and crosses were displayed. Suddenly I saw a man approaching us in a kamelaukion with a very big cross-Crucifixion on his chest. First I didn't recognize him but later I restored in my mind the photo from Father Gabriel's book and finally recognized it was the Elder. Father Gabriel passed by one of the women from our congregation and approached another, Madame "N." Standing behind her he said: "A foul odor from her is from the same sin." Then pointing at a direction of Georgia, he



Miracle - working icon of St. Saviour, Father Gabriel's gift to the family of Lea Kobachishvili



Miraculous opening of the icon casing

told me: "Cut that dress into small pieces and distribute among those who need."

It was rather a strange dream. The next day I saw Madame "N" and retold her my dream. It appeared she saw me also in her dream. Shedding tears, she said, when she had been in Mtskheta at Samtavro Convent, the Elder called her Madame "N" and asked her to sew him a dress, but she didn't.

After that I called the Patriarchy of Georgia and talked to Shorena, the secretary-adviser to the Patriarch. She put me through Metropolitan Daniel and after that I dared to address you.

I wanted to be truthful before Father Gabriel, who raises his prayers for us. Every Georgian living in France feels it. There are also many worshippers cured by holy oil from his icon-lamp.

Being in Georgia in 2004, I paid homage to the holy place - Father Gabriel's grave at Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino. I was sitting there for a long time, shedding tears for my sins. I talked to mother Paraskeva, listened to the chants hymned to the Elder. And I felt a strong desire to become worthy of monastic life. Mother Paraskeva hurriedly went out and returned with Father Gabriel's imperishable blood and blessed me with it as a token of approval saying Father Gabriel would rejoice at my decision.

Father Gabriel's life, his deeds, his love prompted me to draw his portrait as I saw him in my dream. I am sending this portrait to you.



*Archimandrite Gabriel –
my most beloved Elder in Georgia!*

Maia Chanturia, France

Elder Gabriel's Homilies

Father Gabriel never wrote down his edifications. His words were etched in the heart and mind of his spiritual children. In his toils he was sparing neither his physical, mental nor spiritual powers. Who knows how many persons were led towards the path of light, how many of them were saved from being fallen into the abyss of vanity.

Spiritual children to show their gratefulness and reverence towards their beloved Elder in their reminiscences retell of the kindness implanted into their hearts by their wise edifier.

Out of the reminiscences the pearls were chosen that represent "Elder Gabriel's short homilies."

These teachings are eternal, they are guiding us today as well. Let's share the treasure left by the Elder with those whose hearts are lit to perceive the truth.

Seas dry up, mountains collapse, but the glory of Christ remains for ever.

Death is transfiguration. Don't be afraid of death, rather be afraid of the Judgement Day.

When you go in for examination before your professor, your heart starts palpitating; imagine how you will feel before the Creator. Greatness of God is incomparable.

Your soul belongs to the One Who bestowed it to you.

Try to strive for God constantly. Having seen your aspiration for God, the Lord will grant you with all that is necessary.

God is infinite Love, Goodness and Justice. Who loves goodness and justice, he loves God and he is loved by God as his own child.

It is not God who abandons a man, but a man abandons God. Hades – is estrangement from God.

The righteous doesn't have the fear of God.

When mentioning the name of the Lord your God, get up and make the sign of the cross.

Do not use the name of the Lord your God in vain, if you do it, you break the third commandment.

Christ didn't walk on the roads laid with carpets. He was simple; hypocrisy and pomposity were repulsive for Him. Christ was wearing only one tunic knitted by the Holy Mother of God.

Conscience is small God. Before going to bed, render a short account to yourself: how you spent the day, what you did, when you sinned, what should have been done. Be demanding towards yourself.

We think we possess love. But what is love, how to perceive it? According to Apostle Paul : "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres" (I Corinth., 13. 4-7). This is genuine love that the happiness of the mankind rests on. Love is the greatest virtue, but it is still more important to learn how to love. Without sacrifice for the sake of God and the neighbour, neither spiritual heights nor love can be achieved.

Idle talk is offensive for God. Kind deeds mean love for the neighbour.

The last time a man will be saved by love, humbleness and kindness. Kindness will open the gates of Heaven; humbleness will lead into the Heaven; the man, whose heart is filled with love, will see God.

If to save a sick neighbour, you are determined to go far away at night, through a dense wood irrespective of all dangers and bring him medicine – this is love for the neighbour.

If you possess everything but love, consider you possess nothing.

Love dominates all rules and laws.

Love will tame even the fiercest lion.

Denounce a man with love.

Even if you hate only one person, in his image you hate Christ Himself, therefore you are too far from the Heavenly Kingdom.

Faith and love are perceived through sufferings.

Devoted love for man made Saint Shio of Mgville retreat to a cave.

Love each other. Georgia will be saved by love. We are witnessing the last age. You will see the antichrist. The Lord our God will demand love for God and the neighbour, whoever holds out to the end will be saved.

How to love a malicious person? By hating evil. By God's will, a man inflicting evil now, through lamentation, fasting and repentance, some day may be purged of sin and turn into an angel.

Love your enemy - it is clear. But how to love Christ's enemy? Stop hating him and then you will be able to love him.

Love everyone; if you can't, at least show goodwill.

The Lord our God demands pure heart and kind deeds from us.

Have kind disposition towards your fellow men; as for helping a man in need, it requires wisdom which is God's gift - it is a kind of sacrifice made to God.

Egoism is opposed to love. Egoist never gives anything out, he wants only to get. Even all riches of the world are not sufficient for him.

When you do something good - you ascend one step up; when you sin, you descend one step down. Our life consists of such ups and downs.

How can a man's soul be calm, if his neighbour is in danger? If someone is sick at home, and there is no one to take care of him, it's better not attend the church service, but stay at home and show affection towards the neighbour.

A man striving for kind deeds for the sake of the neighbour is striving to save his own soul.

To feed doves and other birds is a kind deed.

The eye is a mirror of your soul. Should it be against soul's will, you would never look at anything wrong.

The first curer is God, the next one is a doctor, but the one who gives no thanks to doctor, gives no thanks to God. The worker is to be rewarded. Hands and mind of a doctor make God pleasing deeds.

When having meals, remember those, who are in need: hungry, thirsty, suffering - this way you learn how to draw up Divine grace.

If you are slandered or your good deed is repaid with evil, bear no malice in your heart. Forgive the slanderer and rejoice that you have ascended towards God by few steps.

A humbled man is protected from temptations. No one can enter the Kingdom of God without humbleness.

If you don't fall you will never rise and feel repentance. I am a great sinner myself, that's why I have a special feeling of compassion for all sinners.

It doesn't do for the Christian to moan.

For God all sins are like sea pebbles. There exists no sin that may surpass God's compassion.

We have to repent with our hearts rather than shed tears.

He who exalts himself will be humbled and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

Meekness is an ever lit God pleasing candle.

Mercy is gold, humbleness is diamond.

Be aware of your weakness.

Have you sinned? Repent immediately!

Do you want to be saved? Hasten in giving alms, have brotherly love towards your fellow-men.

Will everyone be saved? No. God is merciful but not to all; nobody can help you unless you strive for your salvation. Whoever saves his soul and helps the neighbour by word or deed, obeys the commandments of God. Having free will, you must strive for salvation.

Consciousness is a small particle of God in your heart.

Christ was recognized by His humbleness and wisdom.

Man has to bless his path by reasonable decisions. His path depends on the way he acts. God has endowed man with free will. Who am I to interfere?

Someone may say, it was his fate. There is no fate. If his fate was to die and it was determined beforehand, why is he to be judged on the Day of Judgment? We create our fate ourselves. If a man out of his recklessness puts his life at a risk, what does it have to do with fate?

Without God's will, even no bread crumbs fell down.

A man is put to test by Holy Providence as admitted by God.

Never lose hope for God's Providence.

It is difficult for a man to perceive the meaning of Providence. There are three events ascribed to Divine interposition: Admission, the Will of God and Providence. Admission means that a man is given free will by God to do whatever he wants. By the Will of God, a man does whatever God commands him to do; it is always beneficial and aimed to save man's soul. Providence means the care exercised by God to control over Admission and Will. If you

find the problem too difficult to solve, entrust it Providence and don't think about it any more.

The spirit comprises three faculties: rational, emotional and volitional. Rational is in man's mind, emotional is in his heart, volitional is in his body. The immortal spirit, contrary to animals and birds, involves the fear of God, conscience and strivings for God. The immortal spirit is in blood, but it is not only blood. Before the Fall, soul and body submitted to spirit. After the Fall, the communication with spirit was interrupted and soul remained under volitional control. Whatever wish has the volitional faculty, the same will is exercised by soul. Soul dislocates, spirit intellectualizes mind through consciousness. For the salvation of a man, God gave him conscience, which allows man to distinguish good from bad. This is the reason why sometimes we have a feeling of joy or dislike towards a passing by stranger.

Remember: Christ is the only One, there will never be another.

Morals and manners are changing in Georgia. Those carried away by worldly temptations, will be easily recognized: they will walk naked. The way a person is dressed reflects his spiritual state. The Christians' clothing will be modest. According to the Holy Church canons, a woman wearing a man's dress is condemned.

The coming of antichrist had been anticipated before, there were wars also, but there were neither signs from Heaven nor general Apostacy.

During the antichrist times, the strongest temptation will be anticipation of salvation from cosmos, from "humanoids", "extraterrestrials" that are actually masks of demons. The struggler of prayer should rarely look up at the sky, as the signs might be deceptive and he may be ruined.

Half of the Hell is already on the Earth. Antichrist was already born, he is at the door, he is not knocking, he is breaking in. You will witness his reign. His seal will be made visibly on the forehead and arms.

The antichrist will not be enthroned in Georgia and the persecutions here will be considerably less severe. Woe is to those who will try to interpret the Holy Testament in their own way. Later the antichrist followers will also attend church, make sign of the cross, preach Holy Testament. Genuine believers will be recognized by kind deeds.

Satan has spread 666 traps. His seal will be made not only invisibly but also visibly on the forehead and arms. If the seal impression is made by force, in God's sight it will be considered like virgin disgraced. The hardest trial for Christians will be their relatives who accepted the seal. The seal won't effect if made against someone's will. But imagine the trap set by antichrist for a mother having left with five children. How to feed them if not accept the seal?

The seal will be put on the forefinger, not on the palm. It will be invisible, it will be put under the skin with the help of the computer. First, the seal will be offered to volunteers. However, whith the enthronement of antichrist everyone will be pressed to accept the seal. Disobedience will be claimed a treachery. People will flee to the woods. Precautions should be taken to move in groups of about ten-fifteen, as the demon might try to nudge them from the cliffs. The believers will be protected by the Holy Spirit. Whatever happens, never lose hope. Help each other. God will open your mind and you will know how to react. The one who endures will be saved. No true believer will feel either hunger, or thirst. In the time of disaster he will not wither. The Lord will work miracles for them. One leaf of a plant will provide enough food for a month. By making the sign of the cross a lump of earth will be changed into bread.

Georgia will be enlightened in the last age and it will be revealed not materially but spiritually. The believers from many countries will gather in Georgia. Wicked deeds started by the communists, is only a prologue. The main events are coming. From time immemorial, the world has never witnessed such sorrow. And this is the end. Georgia will be protected by the Holy Virgin as Iberia is the country chosen by the Holy Mother of God as Her lot. The fight between the prophets Enoch, Elias and antichrist will be shown on TV. Leaving of Holy Mountain by the icon of the Iberian Holy Virgin will be followed by bell ringing, and churches will bow to commemorate the farewell. This also will be shown on TV, so that the whole world could see it and those, who want to save their souls, could come to Georgia.

True faith finds its place in the man's heart, not in his mind. Antichrist will be disclosed by the believers having their faith in their hearts, those with their faith in their minds will follow antichrist.

Some food products have already been sealed, but it doesn't matter. Before taking meals you have to say the Lord's prayer, make the sign of the cross and sprinkle the food with sanctified water.

Don't take bread from a person who accepted the antichrist's seal.

If you steal food you will break one of the commandments, this way you will become the antichrist's follower. The believers will be entrusted on God.

Monk can not be carefree, he is Christ's warrior.

Woe is to a monk who do not share the anguish of his own people.

Genuine monk is the one whose heart is as considerate as a woman's.

The dignity of a Heghumenos is not a title of honour granted to a monk, but rather a possibility of achieving humbleness, humility. To someone it is granted for salvation, to others for destruction.

Never try to excuse yourself and do not do anything of your own will.

Even if angel himself appears before you in his splendid grandeur, do not do anything without blessing, never change the blessing given by your spiritual father.

Remember your spiritual father is always with you and watches each step you make.

The monk should fatigue himself with physical work. He will be saved by toiling.

Monasticism is a celestial order. To achieve perfection you have to pass through fire of temptations.

Monk must live a simple life. God's grace is in simplicity.

Monk must have steadfast spirit; he has to struggle for the truth, as the truth is God Himself.

Monk like a roaring lion must uphold the Orthodox faith.

Good monk will content himself with prosphora only.

Monasticism is a combat, strive for God till the last breath.

If monk has no humbleness and penitence, there is no salvation for him.

Monastery is not a hotel, it is a big vessel of love.

Monastic grace is lost in the world.

Don't leave the monastery for a long time.

There is no greater heroism than monasticism.

Praise may ruin the monk. The one who praises a monk, is his enemy.

The monk, too, needs compassion and consolation.

If you want to be a monk – you are already a monk.

To approach a monk means to play with fire.

If a layman overcomes his passions due to Christ, he is placed on the same footing as a monk.

For the Lord it is not so important whether you are a monk or a layman, important is to have thirst for God. And through this thirst a man can be saved. The monk will be judged by monastic canons, while the secular by worldly rules.

To be saved monks must live according to the Gospel, the seculars must obey ten commandments.

Never betray God. Endure all trials and the gates of the Heavens will be opened for you.

In order to be saved, don't be excessively concerned with your body rather with your soul. Whoever wins the tongue and gluttony is already on the right path.

It's impossible to be saved without grief.

Impertinent is the one who does not see his transgressions and boasts of himself. Those, whose hearts are filled with pride and vain-glory are loathsome before God.

If you consider yourself to have superiority above others – you are loathsome before God.

Don't take an offering "Juda's money." With such money you will be involved into sin from which it is rather difficult to recover.

All sinners repented are God's children; they are admitted to receive the Holy Communion.

Be concerned with your own business, not with others' transgressions. Sit and cry over your own sins.

To place pictures of icons in daily newspapers is a crime.

Failing to keep one's word is a grave sin.

Have only one fear - not to sin.

If you never fell, you will never perceive the Lord's power. Should I be faultless how could I love God?

Stealing is a sin, but to thief sacred items is a graver sin.

God's wrath is on women who had an abortion. Repent and pray constantly so that God may forgive your sin of slaughtering your own children.

Outrage and impudence is the origin of any transgression.

He who gives unjust orders is more sinful than the one who executes them.

You cannot demand much of a person if you never gave him anything.

Never worship a worldly man.

Don't give advice to your neighbour if you do not know his spiritual state. Your advice may aggravate his state to such an extent as to ruin him.

Any kind of transgression is display of hostility towards God. Think for a moment - whom you are wrestling with?

Never judge, the only Judge is God. Who condemns, resembles an empty ear of wheat, whose head is always uplifted.

If you see a killer, a whore or a drunkard prostrated on the ground, never judge them, since their bridles have been loosened by God while yours are hold firm. If God sets free your rein, you will find yourself in a worse condition and commit the sin which you had condemned and get ruined. As a thread passes through the needle's eye, the same way you have to pass through the sin you have committed.

The Cross born by the Catholicos-Patriarch of Georgia is very heavy. Who judges him, puts burning charcoal on his own head.

When you condemn someone, you condemn God.

You condemn someone for having sinned. But have you seen that he repented and God absolved him?

Denounce your neighbour, but do not condemn, as it is quite different.

Heghumenos has to denounce spiritual children to reveal their faults. If they disobey, God is their judge.

Your trials are due to your little faith. Ask God to forgive you and strengthen your faith.

Faith is the God's blessed talent.

To live with no faith in God and beyond the Church is equal to blasphemy.

If your faith has been abused in your presence and you kept silent, you are worse than the abuser.

Your soul dies when you do nothing to defend your faith; but when you die to defend your faith, the door to the Kingdom of Heaven opens before you.

Thank God that you were born an Orthodox by faith. Display steadfast spirit, do not be tempted with a concern whether people of other religions will be saved or not. This is not our prerogative but God's unfailing love.

Ecumenism is a super heresy.

It is better to be a street-walker than to be addicted to heresy.

The Orthodox Church is a ship sailing over the rough and stormy ocean. The Orthodox Christians are the passengers of the ship, while people of other religions are swimmers in the open sea.

If you do not obey God's commandments, do not bother the Lord by your long prayers, they will not be heard.

If prayers are not followed by kind deeds, the prayers are dead.

Correct your fellow-man once, twice, three times, if rejected, leave him.

If while saying prayers you are asked for help and you say: "Let me first finish the prayers and then I'll help you," your prayers are of no use.

Your benevolences or fervent prayers should be given to God as your sacrifice.

When someone raises prayers before the icons or crosses made by you, half of the blessing comes on you.

If you witness someone is being robbed and you can't do anything, start saying the Lord's prayer.

The prayers of Memorial Services are required not only for the departed person to forgive his sins, but also for the one who says the prayers.

A mentally diseased person, who committed suicide, will be forgiven by God. However, a person, who intentionally took his life, goes to Hades. We can not pray for them but to help them, we have to give alms and perform good deeds in the name of the departed. Sometimes they are brought out of Hades.

Say prayers with profound reverence, consider before whom you are standing, whom you are talking to. Christ is always invisibly with us.

Resemble a child by purity of heart and innocence but not by mind.

When the demon captures a man, first he deprives him of his mind.

It is bad when your tongue runs ahead while your mind lags behind.

In worshipping the icons, touch or kiss the icon-case, but not the image.

For physical and spiritual strength, take holy water and proskynia with trust and reverence.

The more grace the more is reward.

Great holiness possesses God gifted grace having a circle around it. No evil is able to approach such a circle.

Do not always trust your eyes and ears – you might be deceived.

A child in mother's womb can hear everything. Be careful as to your words and behavior, choose the God's words, as upbringing starts from the first day the child is brought to life.

Some consider they have no sexual appeal, but since there is sex distinction there will always be a warfare. If the person is overwhelmed by his lust but he suppresses it due to the love for Christ he is crowned with glory.

You have to choose your spiritual father on your will; but having chosen him, show complete obedience to him. If his teachings are heretical, flee from him as from fire.

You have to refer to the Elder in case of spiritual need, for edifications and to learn wisdom.

To become wise, first you must be stupid.

Who does not rejoice in Holy Week but cries over his sins, he behaves like Judah.

If you want to start a family, get married but keep all accepted norms.

The face of the Lord is turned away from those who hate meat and bread.

God's grace has always been with the Georgian Orthodox Church. The endless chain of saints has never been broken and will never break.

Georgia will rise like Lazarus through many hardships and sufferings, but not until restoration of monarchy. The salvation will come when you feel: "This is the End."

The blessing descends upon a person at his birthplace.

The Heavenly Kingdom is the most blessed God's domain. On the earth, by its sanctity after Jerusalem, comes Sveti-Tskhovely and then Samtavro Convent of Saint Nino, where Equal – to-the-Apostles – Saint was making her preaches with the Cross made of vine, given by the Holy Virgin.

My Cross is Georgia and half of Russia.

Georgia is a country chosen by the Most Holy Mother of God as Her lot. Do not abandon your Motherland in hard times. Do not offend Her.

How to pray for your enemies? First, pray for those whom you love more, for example your children. Then pray for the other members of your family, then for your neighbours and relatives in order not to have enemies. Bless the town where you live, not only Tbilisi but all cities of Georgia. Since there is not only Georgia, but other countries around it, request God to avert hostility from peoples. Now that you prayed for everyone, only your enemy is left. Ask God to fill his heart with kindness, his mind with wisdom. This way you will be able to pray for your enemies.

I am leaving you this testament: Raise your prayers for everyone, your prayers will move the mountains. Love each other.



Perceive God, know the Lord.

*SUCH WAS OUR GABRIEL
ELDER OF THE NEW AGE
NOW ONLY FEW CAN PERCEIVE
HIS SPIRITUAL HEIGHTS*

**ARCHBISHOP THADEUS
(Ioramashvili)**

C O N T E N T

Some Episodes from Elder Gabriel's Life	4
Reminiscences:	
Metropolitan Daniel (Datuashvili)	14
Metropolitan Sergius (Chekurishvili)	14
Archbishop Thaddaeus (Ioramashvili)	14
Archimandrite Timothy, Greece	14
Schearchimandrite Vitaliy (Sidorenko)	14
Heghumenos Philaret (Gudinov)	14
Heghumenos Eliseos (Belkania)	14
Archimandrite Ephrem, Russia	14
Heghumenos Steleanos, Holy Mount of Athos	15
Heghumenos Simeon (Abramishvili)	15
Archpriest Pavel Kosach, Tbilisi	15
Monk Tikhon Bogoliuboff, Russia	15
Heghumene Georgia, Jerusalem	15
Romanos Samsonoff, Russia	15
Nikolaos Venalousoff, Russia	15
Oleg – Trokha, Russia	15
Giuli Chokhonelidze, Georgia	15

Gia Kobachishvili, Tbilisi	16
Valeria Alfeeff, Russia	16
American church of Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood	16
Metropolitan Isaiah (Chanturia)	18
Archbishop Seraphim (Jojua)	21
Archimandrite Tornike (Moseshevili)	21
Archimandrite Michael (Gabrichidze)	22
Heghumene Ketevan (Kopaliani)	26
Archpriest Vakhtang (Asatiani)	35
Archpriest Ushanghi (Charkviani)	35
Heghumenos Lazarus (Gagnidze)	36
SchemHeghumene Johanna (Sikharulidze)	38
Schemanun Nino (Dashniani)	40
Archimandrite Sabbas (Kutchava)	44
Heghumene Mariam (Mikeladze)	48
Heghumene Theodora (Makhviladze)	50
Nun Paraskeva (Rostiashvili)	53
Archpriest Neophitos (Davitashvili)	68
Nun Ekatherine (Ebralidze)	69
Nun Nana (Kutateladze)	72
Nun Nino (Julakidze)	73
Nun Elizabeth (Zedgenidze)	76
Nun Thekla (Oniani)	79

Nun Nino (Peikrishvili)	81
Nun Theodora (Bolkvadze)	83
Nun Pelagia (Ksovreli)	85
Nun Nana (Agladze)	87
Martha Tarkhnishvili (Saingilo)	88
Ketevan Surmava (Russia)	89
Otar Nikolaishvili (Georgia)	91
Lia Kobachishvili (Georgia)	95
Maia Chanturia (France)	96
Elder Gabriel's Homilies	99