

EULOGY AT THE FUNERAL OF MOTHER MARIA

**Orthodox Monastery of the Nativity of the Mother of God
Asten, June 28, 2016**

**Metropolitan Athenagorus of Belgium
Exarch of the Netherlands and Luxemburg**

For I am ready now to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing. (2 Tim. 4: 6-8)

Your Excellence Metropolitan Athanasios of Achaia,
Your Excellence Bishop Bartholomeos of Arianzos,
Reverend Fathers,
Reverend Mothers and Sisters,
Respected Family Members,
Brothers and Sisters,

Today we are gathered around the body of the reposed Mother Maria, the former Abbess of this Holy Monastery, who gave her life to Christ and His Church.

At this sacred moment when we are about to bear her to her grave, we reflect on the significance of her life for the Orthodox Church in the Netherlands and the surrounding countries. In viewing her life as a whole, we note how courageous she was in taking important decisions in her life. Born in The Hague, she grew up in a loving family with respect for all human beings and love for nature. Although she did not receive a Christian upbringing, she interested herself in the great questions of life at a very early age, and in consequence she became an Orthodox Christian at the age of eighteen. She entered the Orthodox Monastery in The Hague, but soon went in search of more Orthodox tradition, first to Serbia, and then to Greece. In Greece she soon felt at home. She found in the monasteries there the living tradition which has been handed down through the centuries. It was good for her to make, more or less, a new start there. She entered a monastery in Greece with the assumption that she would stay there her whole life.

After many years, however, in her personal prayer life she came to the realization that she was called to return to her land of origin. I remember very vividly how, together with Fr. Silouan of blessed memory, and Matushka Odette, she visited me during my lengthy stay in the hospital. That was in 1985. At that time there was yet no mention of a monastic foundation, although such a project was taking form in her prayer life. After all, with her thirteen years of experience of monastic life in a traditional Orthodox country, she was in a position to plant this form of life in the soil of her own land. Needless to say, she did not take this decision alone, but after consultation with spiritual fathers and her monastic directors. At first, in 1986, she was given hospitality by the then Archimandrite Pachom, staying in the garden house of the monastery in St. Hubert, until, in January, 1989, she could move here to Asten. His Eminence Panteleimon, the former Metropolitan of Belgium, received her without hesitation into our Archdiocese, and on the 8th of September, 1989, he blessed the foundation of the small monastery.

Everyone will agree that it was a courageous decision to come here to lead an ascetic life entirely alone. It is true that she was soon surrounded by a group of believers, and Father Silouan, who was ordained priest by Metropolitan Panteleimon in the beginning of 1990, served Liturgy here regularly, as well as in the parish of Eindhoven. Mother Maria was deeply concerned that Orthodoxy strike roots in the ground of her own land, with the use of the local language and the veneration of the local saints of the Undivided Church.

This zeal for the actual planting of Orthodoxy in her own land reminds me of the words of my father, who also fell asleep in the Lord a month and a half ago. In the beginning of the 90's, he said in a speech to the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos that the Orthodox communities in the West must not be introduced as flowerpots, because then they can never strike root! The same path has been followed in the Patriarchal Monastery in Maldon (Essex), and in the many Orthodox Monasteries in France and elsewhere in Western Europe, who nevertheless always maintain a living connection with the tradition of the Orthodox Church.

Mother Maria's monastic foundation here in the beautiful region of the Peel has been blessed with a rich diversity of nuns, coming from various countries and with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. It was a great challenge to form a community together, and it was possible because the guideline is the Gospel. Orthodox monastic life is not easy in this corner of the Western secularized world, but under the protection of the Most Holy Mother of God and with the blessing and prayers of several spiritual fathers this common life and common prayer was firmly established: a testimony to all pilgrims and visitors, a lighthouse of faith and prayer for

the world, a haven for all in need.

From the very start the Monastery was visited by innumerable believers from the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany, and other countries. They enjoy the quiet liturgical services, the hospitality, meeting others, the support: for the Orthodox Christians in our region, Asten has become an oasis of spiritual life and asceticism. And then there is the Monastery feast day, a day when hundreds of pilgrims reconfirm their ties with the Monastery.

But Asten is also a place where other monks and nuns come, because there is bond between all who choose for an ascetic life. This usually takes place quietly and humbly. We remember here especially Archimandrite Arsenios of the Monastery of Machaira on Cyprus, who gave Mother Maria the great schema, and who perished tragically in a helicopter accident together with Patriarch Petros of Alexandria.

Mother Maria's leading interest was without doubt the revision of the liturgical texts in Dutch, after comparison with the original Greek texts, and the translation of such liturgical hymns and texts as were not yet available in our language.

Mother Maria will remain in everyone's memory as a great personality of the Orthodox Church in the Netherlands. Her interest, dedication, and personal qualities have unquestionably been very important for the Orthodox presence in our countries. Thanks to her, so many Orthodox faithful have had a living contact with an authentic monasticism in the Netherlands.

In 2014, exactly twenty-five years after its foundation, her Monastery was honored by a visit from His All-Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomeos. In her speech, she sketched a picture of the tragic situation of today's secularized Netherlands. This speech made a great impression on the Ecumenical Patriarch. According to him, she had placed her finger directly on the wound.

We are all so thankful for what Mother Maria has done for our church and for this country, and also that God, despite the health problems she struggled with for years, let her live all these years among us. These years were of vital importance for our Monastery, as she was then able, together with sisters, to set the course for the years to come. Her sisters will now miss her very much, but they know, as do we, that this is the lot of all of us, and that we must face the future with hope. We assure the sisters here solemnly that we will not abandon them, but that, on the contrary, we will support and encourage them! We also know that Mother Maria is now their intercessor *par excellence* with God. We remain united with her in the life of the eucharist, and we will always remember her in our humble prayers, because, yes, those who have gone before us also have need of our prayers.

Reverend Mother Maria,

We see you off to eternity with the conviction that you will meet Him in Whom you placed your faith your whole life long, Whom you faithfully and zealously served and unconditionally proclaimed to everyone, whatever their nationality or language. You will meet Him Who will say to you: *Blessed is (s)he who has not seen and yet has believed.* (John 20:29)

Memory Eternal, unforgettable Mother Maria.

Memory Eternal, beloved Mother.

Memory Eternal, Mother Maria.