



# **A Night in the Desert of the Holy Mountain: Discussion with a Hermit on the Jesus Prayer**

*Metropolitan of Nafpaktos Hierotheos Vlachos*

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The author, Metropolitan Hierotheos, is a bishop in the Orthodox Church of Greece, and the author of many books on Christian spiritual life and theology. He is one of the most highly respected and widely read ascetical theologians in the Orthodox Church today. The Holy Mountain is Mt. Athos, a 40 mile long peninsula in northeastern Greece which is home to several thousand Orthodox monks, whose chief work is "praying without ceasing" using the Jesus Prayer, handed down from the early Church. The "desert" refers to the some of the very isolated places on Athos populated by hermit monks living hidden away in little huts or caves (as opposed to the large ancient monasteries on Athos). If we say that the Church is the spiritual army of God, then the monks are the Marines and the hermits are the Green Berets of prayer, interceding for the world and defeating the demons. The bishop is a frequent pilgrim to the Holy Mountain, the spiritual heartland of the Orthodox world. After a particularly fruitful visit with a hermit monk (a God-bearing elder who prefers anonymity), he wrote down their discussion about the Jesus Prayer and published it in Greek (now in over 9 Greek editions). It appeared in English in 1991, with six reprints and a revision, as well as in French, Spanish, Russian, and Arabic. This fascinating conversation has become a modern classic of Orthodox Christian spiritual literature, in the tradition of the Philokalia. Imported from Greece.

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