

The Life of Mother Gabriella

The Lord's words "...take up his cross, and follow Me" changed her life and she gave her life for suffering people – physically and spiritually.

Avrilia Papayanni was born in Constantinople (today Istanbul) more than a century ago on October 2, 1897. She grew up in the city until her family moved to Thessalonika in 1923. She went to England in 1938 and stayed there throughout the Second World War. She trained as a physiotherapist.

In 1945 she returned to Greece where she worked with the Friends Refugee Mission and the American Farm School in Thessalonika in early post-war years. After the death of her mother in 1954, Avrilia had closed her therapy practice, given all her money and belongings to the poor, resolved to live in absolute poverty, and (now aged almost sixty) headed for India with no plan, but a strong sense that Christ had called her there. Avrilia arrived in India with one dress and a Bible (her only reading at that time) where she worked with the poorest of the poor. She worked with Baba Amte and his family who built and organised village-communities for the lepers of India. She kept no penny in her pocket! She just trusted herself to God's care.

It was not until 1959 that she went to the Monastery of Mary and Martha in Bethany, Palestine, to become a nun, receiving the name Gavrilia (Gabriella). She was three years in Bethany. She travelled extensively, with much concern and a broad love for the people of God. Some of her spiritual children met her in Jerusalem beside the Tomb of Christ; others met her on the mission field of East Africa. In the 50's and 60's she had thousands of spiritual friends from all over the world! She used to pray for all these every day and night!

Gerontissa Gabriella passed from this world on March 28, 1992. Only the angels could count the number of lives that God touched and changed through her.

Anyone who knew the Gerontissa realized that God has not left us without His saints, even down to the present day. She was humility and love incarnate.¹

Reading: St. Theophan:

When the personal cross of each of us is united with Christ's Cross, the power and effect of the latter is transferred to us and becomes, as it were, a conduit through which "every good gift and every perfect gift" (James 1:17) is poured forth upon us from the Cross of Christ. (St. Theophan)²

Activity: "The Unity of the Cross"

We unite our personal cross with the Cross of Christ through love.

Make paper crosses, big enough to have place for writing and decorating. Ask students to write some quotations of Mother Gabriella and decorate crosses. You can choose other forms, like hearts, circles. Then stick them in the classroom or decorate them and distribute next Sunday in your parish.

Quotations:

Love is only found on the Cross.

Three things are needful: First Love, Second Love, Third Love.

Few words: much love, to all, no matter who they are.

"If you have love for the whole world the whole world is beautiful."

"Do not respond to a person with the evil he brings you, but see Christ in his heart."

"As God loves you, so does He love your enemy."

"Love is a bomb the destroys all evil."

"What does God want me to do?...The answer is: God is not interested in where you are or what you do...He is interested only in the quality and quantity of the love you give. Nothing else. Nothing else."

¹ The story is adapted from: [https://orthodoxwiki.org/Gabrielia_\(Papayannis\)](https://orthodoxwiki.org/Gabrielia_(Papayannis)) and <http://www.abbamoses.com/mothergav.html>

² <http://orthodoxwayoflife.blogspot.bg/2012/12/bearing-cross-what-does-this-mean.html>