

This Holy and Beautiful Land



Petros loved the beautiful and holy island of Crete. He had been born there and had lived all his life there. Now that he was an old man he was ready to leave the world for heaven, but he did not wish to leave his beloved land, the beautiful and holy island of Crete.

He decided that he would take some of Crete's holy soil to heaven with him. He took a handful of soil and kept firmly gripped in his fist. He sat outside his house waiting for God come to collect him, and take him to heaven.

One day soon God arrived, disguised as a messenger from the king. 'It is time for you to come with me,' said God.

'Yes, I will come,' said Petros.

'But what do you have in your fist?' asked God.

'It's a handful of soil from my beloved and holy island of Crete,' replied Petros. 'I wish to bring it with me.'

'No, you can bring nothing with you,' said God, disguised as a messenger from the king. Petros refused to open his fist and let the soil drop, and God left him. Petros sat for many more years at the door of his house, waiting for God to collect him, and take him to heaven.

One day God arrived again, disguised this time one of Petros's oldest and closest friends. 'It is time for you to come with me,' said God.

'Yes, I will come,' said Petros.

'But what do you have in your fist?' asked God.

'It's a handful of soil from my beloved and holy island of Crete,' replied Petros. 'I wish to bring it with me.'

'No, you can bring nothing with you,' said God, disguised as one of Petros's oldest and closest friends. Petros refused to open his fist and let the soil drop, and God left him. Petros sat again for many more years at the door of his house, waiting for God to collect him, and take him to heaven.

One day, after many years, God returned, this time disguised as Petros's great granddaughter. Petros was delighted to see her. 'It is time for you to come with me,' said God, disguised as his great granddaughter.

'Yes, I will come,' said Petros.

He looked into her eyes and saw there also the eyes of all his other great grandchildren. And he saw the eyes of his grandchildren, and the eyes of his children. And he saw also, as he looked, the eyes of himself when he too had been a small trusting child. 'I will come with you,' he said.

'But what do you have in your clenched fist?' she asked. He began to explain, but very gently and sweetly the little child opened his fingers, and the soil fell to the ground.

And what do you think he saw when he arrived in heaven? What is the very first thing he saw there?

Yes, there in heaven the first thing he saw, all around him, was his beloved island, the beautiful and holy island of Crete.

Source: traditional, and in this version *Inside Stories: wisdom and hope for changing worlds* by Angela Wood and Robin Richardson, Trentham Books 1992.