

SAINT MAKARIOS

—Commemorated January 19th—

Saint Makarios related the following about himself when he was asked how he came to the *skete*¹: “When I was younger and lived in a hut in Egypt, they forced me to become a clergyman and wanted to appoint me to serve in the city. I, however, did not want to take on such a responsibility, so I left and went to live in a different region. There, a very pious layman would come to my hut to take my handicraft, he would then take it to the city where he would sell it, and bring back provisions to me. It so happened in those days that a young girl in the city fell into sin, and became pregnant. When her family questioned her, ‘who did this?’ she replied, ‘the hermit who lives just outside the city.’ As a result, all the locals came and apprehended me. They hung pots, ladles, and baskets around my neck, they dragged me through the city streets, hitting me and proclaiming, “this monk led our daughter astray. Take him away, send him away!’ They beat me so bad, that I came close to death. However, an elderly gentlemen stepped in and said, ‘how long will you keep hitting the visiting monk?’ The layman who tended to my needs, in the meantime, was following behind me ashamed, because he was also being ridiculed by the family: ‘See what this monk, who you were so proud of, did?’ Finally, the girl’s parents said, ‘we will not let him go, unless someone guarantees that he will provide for her needs from now on.’ I then asked my friend to become a guarantor and he agreed. When I returned to my hut, I gave him all the handicrafts I had made, and instructed him, ‘sell these and take food to my wife.’ And I would say to myself, ‘Look Makarios: now you have a wife. You must henceforth work a little more in order to earn enough to feed her.’ And so, I began to work night and day, and I would send her whatever I earned. However, when it was time for this poor girl to give birth, she began experiencing labor pains for many days without being able to deliver the baby. Her family then asked her: ‘why are you having such a difficulty?’ And she replied, ‘I know why. It is because I slandered the hermit, and I falsely accused him with my lies. He is not to blame... so and so is responsible.’ After this, my cell attendant came to me overjoyed, and informed me, ‘the young girl was unable to give birth until she confessed that the monk is

¹ *Sketes* were small, semi-eremitic monastic communities comprised of many individual huts located at some distance around a central church, offering a middle ground between the total solitude of hermits and the communal life in larger monasteries.

not guilty, and that she bore false witness against him. And now the entire city wants to come here in a procession, in order to prostrate themselves before you and ask for forgiveness.’ When I heard all this, however, in order to avoid being troubled by the people, I got up and left, and I came here to this *skete*.”

One time Saint Makarios visited a hermit who was living all alone, who had not a single person to help him. When the Saint saw that the hermit was suffering from an illness, he asked him if he would like to eat anything in particular. The hermit replied that he would like a sesame brittle. Immediately, Saint Makarios got up, walked to Alexandria to buy one, and then went straight back to offer it to the sick hermit. The remarkable thing is that the Saint did this without anyone finding out.

Another time, Saint Makarios was heading from the *skete* where he lived to the mount of Nitria. As he was approaching the mountain, he told his disciple who was accompanying him to go ahead of him. As his disciple got further ahead, he encountered a priest of the idols, and he yelled out to him: “Where are you headed, you demon?” The idolater priest took exceptional offense to this. He turned around and used a stick to beat him to a pummel. He then started to run from the scene with the stick in his hand. In a short while, Saint Makarios encountered him and greeted him with the following words: “May you be saved, may you be saved, you poor man!” Amazed, the idolater approached the saint and asked, “What good did you see in me, to speak to me like that?” The saint replied, “I did so because I saw that you are very tired. And also because you are unaware that you toil in vain.” “From the way you greeted me,” revealed the idolater, “I felt something in my heart. And I realized that you are a man of God. There was another bad monk just now who spoke rudely to me when he saw me, and I beat him up and left him half-dead on the ground.” The saint realized that this was his disciple. In the meantime, the idolater priest unexpectedly fell to the ground, embraced Saint Makarios’ feet and said: “I will not let go of you if you do not make me a monk.” After raising him to his feet, Saint Makarios proceeded with him to the spot where the monk was lying on the ground; they lifted him and carried him to the chapel on the mountain. When the monks saw the idolater priest with Saint Makarios, they were astonished. The former idolater priest was indeed baptized and then tonsured a monk. And on account of him, many other idolaters also became Christians. Consequently, Saint Makarios

would say, “An evil word is capable of turning even good people into bad people. Whereas a good word can transform evil people into good people.”

Once, while Saint Makarios was returning to his cell from a nearby marsh, carrying reeds on his back, the devil appeared before him holding a sickle. The devil then attempted to strike him, but was unable to do so. Frustrated, the devil said, “I have met great resistance from you Makarios, and I cannot harm you— despite the fact that I do all the things you do! You fast? I never eat. You hold vigil at night? I never sleep. There is only one thing you possess, with which you defeat me.” “What is that?” asked Saint Makarios. And the devil replied, “Your humility. This utterly destroys me.”

If a visitor ever went to Saint Makarios reverently, approaching him as if he was a great elder and saint, Saint Makarios would not speak to him at all. If, on the other hand, a visitor ever intentionally tried to humble him by asking, “Elder, when you used to be a camel driver and you used to steal and sell natron², wouldn’t the guards give you a lashing?” in that case he would joyfully reply to all the visitor’s questions.

Saint Makarios once said, “If you are moved to anger while correcting someone else, realize that you are satisfying your own passion. You shouldn’t have to lose your soul in order to save someone else.”

Toward the end of Saint Makarios’ life, the elders who dwelled on the mountain sent a request to Saint Makarios who lived in the *skete*. They appealed to him, “Rather than all the monks coming to you, please, we ask that you come here visit us, so we can see you before you repose in the Lord.” Indeed, the Saint set off for the mountain. When he arrived, all the monks gathered around him, and the elders entreated him to say a few words to the monks. To this, the Saint replied, “My brothers, let us cry, and let our eyes bring forth tears before we depart for the next life, because if we cry in the next life, our tears will scorch our bodies.” Upon hearing this, with tears in their eyes, all the monks fell to their knees with their head to the ground saying, “Holy Father, pray for us.”

² Natron is a naturally occurring white mixture of soda ash, sodium bicarbonate, and sodium chloride, which is found in Egypt.