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Putting on Christ

By: St Macarius the Great



All the works, visibly done in this world, are done out of a certain hope of enjoying one's labors and unless anyone is fully convinced that he will profit from his labors, he would see no advantage in doing them. For the farmer sows seeds in the hope of fruit and he undergoes toils on account of what he expects to receive. St. Paul says: "In hope he who plows ought to plow. And who has taken a wife does so in the hope of having offspring" (1 Cor 9:10). A merchant also exposes himself to the perils of the sea and to most imminent death, all for the sake of profit. So also in the Kingdom of Heaven in the hope of having the eyes of his heart illumined, a person gives himself up to

seek the kingdom, putting aside all worldly pursuits, intent on prayers and supplications. He awaits the Lord's coming to manifest Himself to him and cleanse him from sin that indwells him.

He does not rely solely on his own labors and style of life until he obtains the things he hopes for, until the Lord comes and dwells in him in the full experience and the working of the Spirit. When he has tasted the goodness of the Lord and delighted in the fruits of the Spirit and the veil of darkness has been lifted and the light of Christ shines with splendor and brings about in him an unspeakable joy, then he will be completely satisfied in having with him the Lord in much love, as in the example of the merchant rejoicing when he makes a profit. Nonetheless, he undergoes many afflictions and he fears the thieving spirits of iniquity lest, becoming negligent, he may lose the fruit of his work before he obtain the heavenly kingdom, the Heavenly Jerusalem.

Let us, therefore, beg also of God that He would put on us, who have shed the old man, the heavenly Christ, even now, so that established in great joy and thus led by Him, we may be granted the greatest tranquility. For the Lord, who wishes to fill us with a taste of the kingdom, says: "Without me you can do nothing" (Jn 15:5). And still, by using the Apostles, he knew how to enlighten many others. Even



though they were creatures, they fed their fellow-servants. They taught them how to become a brother and a son of Christ to live in a more outstanding way than the rest of men, namely, they sanctified the very heart and mind, likewise the thoughts, so that men directed those to God. And thus God secretly bestows life and all their heartfelt needs and dedicates Himself to them. For when a person surrenders to God his secret possessions, that is, his mind and thoughts, not occupying himself with any other matter or thought or distraction, but subjecting himself to a certain constraint, then the Lord makes him a sharer in His mysteries, in holiness and great purity. He also gives Himself as heavenly food and spiritual drink.

Take the example of a man who has many possessions, servants, and children. He offers one kind of food to his servants, another kind to his children, born of his own seed, because the children are the heir of the father and they eat with him, namely, they are like to their father. So also Christ is that true Lord who has created all things and nourishes the evil and ungrateful. But he has begotten children, born of his own seed whom he has made participators of his grace. In them the Lord is formed and He nourishes them with a special refreshment, nourishment, food and drink that He does not give to other men. He also gives Himself to them who relate to him as to their very own father, as the Lord says: "Whoever eats of my flesh and drinks of my blood, he remains in Me and I in him and he will not see death" (Jn 6:56). Those who possess the true inheritance have been begotten as sons from the heavenly Father and they dwell in their Father's house, as the Lord says: "The servant does not abide in the house, but the son abides forever" (In 8:35).

(From: George A. Maloney, S.J., *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*. Homily 14)



Fr Daoud Lami and other fathers from Sydney Visiting the Monastery



St Macarius the Great

By: One of the Youth



Saint Macarius (which means blessed) the Great was born in the year 295, in a village named Shabsheer, to pious Christian parents; Abraham, who was a priest, and Sarah. Before the saint's birth, his father saw a vision where an angel told him he was going to have a son, whose name will be known all over the Earth, and who would have many spiritual sons. When he grew up, his father forced him to marry against his will. However, he pretended to be sick for several days, and asked his parents to allow him to go to the wilderness to relax and recover. In the wilderness, he prayed to the Lord to direct him. There he saw a vision, in which one of the Cherubim carried him with his wings, took him to the top of the mountain and showed him the entire desert. The Cherub told him that God had given him and his sons (i.e. monks) this wilderness as an inheritance. When he returned,

he found that his wife, who was a virgin, had already passed away. Shortly after, his parents died, that St Macarius gave his entire inheritance to the poor.

As a young man, he was seized and made a priest of a village in Egypt. It happened one day that a girl from that village fell and became pregnant. St Macarius was falsely accused of being the father, and was bitterly insulted, abused and humiliated by her family and the entire village. Astoundingly, instead of proclaiming his innocence, St Macarius reproached himself, saying, *"Macarius, look, you have found yourself a wife! You have to work a little harder in order to take care of her."* So he worked night and day in order to provide for her. When the time came, the woman's labour was exceedingly difficult, and was prolonged for many days until she confessed St Macarius' innocence, and named the man with whom she sinned. When St Macarius heard that the village was coming to his cell to apologize and exalt him for his perseverance and humility, he fled to the wilderness of Sheheet, and thus he began his monasticism.

Wow! **If you were in this situation what would you do?** St Macarius had the guts to bear the responsibility of another's fault, to the extent that he convinced himself that he was guilty, and worked hard to bear the punishment and shame of the sin. In doing so, St Macarius imitated his Christ. If he had done the opposite, and condemned the woman for lying, he would have fallen into judgement and self righteousness. Although it is not wrong to prove your innocence, it is commendable before God to bear the faults of another, *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ"* (Galatians 6:2). It was said of St Macarius that he always covered other people's sins, *"When he saw them (sins), it was as though he did not see them. And when he heard them, it was as though he did not hear them."*



The Different flavours of sin:

Abba Macarius was watching the road one time when he saw Satan approaching, dressed like a traveller, wearing a linen tunic full of holes, and from each hole there hung a pot. Abba Macarius asked him, "Where are you going? What are you going to do with those pots?" The devil answered, "I am on my way to stir up the brother's thoughts. I am taking various kinds of food for the brothers to taste. If this one does not please one of the brothers, I offer him another. Certainly one of them has to please him." St Macarius watched the road until the devil returned, and asked, "How are you?" The devil answered, "Why do you care how I am? The brothers were all rude to me, and none of them welcomed me!" Abba Macarius replied and said, "You didn't make a single friend there?!" And the devil replied and said, "I did make one friend there, and he obeys me. When he sees me, he comes running like the wind... His name is Theopentus."

Abba Macarius got up and went to the monastery in Nitria to find Theopentus, who received him eagerly and with joy. Abba Macarius tried to get Theopentus to confess his sinful thoughts, but Theopentus was too ashamed to tell the truth. St Macarius said to him, "to this day I have practiced asceticism this many years, and everyone honours me. I am an old man, but the spirit of fornication still troubles me." Theopentus replied and said to him, "believe me, my father, I, too, have this trouble." The old man, giving himself permission to speak, spoke of other thoughts that fought against him, until Theopentus confessed. St Macarius gave him ascetic practices to help him overcome his sin, and said to him, "*If a thought comes to you, do not look down to it, but look upwards at all times and God will help you*".

On his way back, St Macarius saw that same demon, and said to him, "where are you going?" He said to Abba Macarius, "I want to stir up the brother's thoughts." When he returned, the saint said to him, "how did it go with the brothers?" And he said to him, "Badly! They were all rude to me, and *the worst one was the one who was my friend, and who used to obey me. I don't know why he changed; only that he does no longer obey me, but has become the rudest of them all.*"

The devil will often entice us with many flavours of sin, some we can easily resist while others are more difficult. We should however, not do as the brother did when he hid his sins from St Macarius as this involves an element of pride. Let us take on the humility of St Macarius and reveal our sins to our confession father, as it says in Proverbs 28:13 "*He who covers his sins will not prosper, But whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.*"

Do we so easily give in to thoughts of temptation or are we game enough to put up a fight? The fathers teach us that thoughts that attack us from the outside are likened to flies which will only settle on us if we allow them to. We need to be "rude" to the devil, in that we must resist temptation from the beginning. We often think that once we have overcome a certain thought, we are strong enough to conquer the other thoughts, but we must remember, "*For she has cast down many wounded, and all who were slain by her were strong men.*"(Proverbs 7:26) i.e. no one is strong against



sin, God is our only refuge and in our victory over sin only He deserves the glory and credit.

St Macarius also teaches us how to treat the weaknesses in others; we not only go down to their level, but furthermore go below them in order to lift them up. In utmost humility, St Macarius confessed to Theopentus that he had thoughts of fornication and spoke to him about the other thoughts that battled him. He did this so that the brother would not be ashamed to confess his own sins, thus lifting him up from the state of shame that he was in from the devil's temptations to repentance. This follows Christ's example in Hebrews 2:18, "*For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted.*" None of us is without sin. When we see the sin of others, we need to empathise and lift them to repentance, instead of judging them, and suppressing them lower.

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4th — 8th July 2011

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Venue: All classes are held at the Macquarie University campus at North Ryde.

Time: 4th - 8th July 2011 at 9.30 am to 1.00 pm, including half-hour break

Cost: For payments received by 10 June cost is \$105/\$85 full/concession. Late enrolments will be accepted at the higher rate of \$125/\$105 until 20 June.

Contact details: email: mals@mq.edu.au / Ph: (02) 9850 9962 F (02) 9850 9001 /
Website: <http://www.anchist.mq.edu.au/mals.html>

Other ancient languages are also offered, see brochure for details.



St Macarius the Spiritbearer

By: Tim Vivian



Macarius the Great, also called Macarius the Egyptian (to distinguish him from Macarius of Alexandria) is one of the most venerated saints of the Coptic Church (his name, which means "blessed," in Greek is "Makarios," in Arabic "Maqar"). He was born around the year 300 in Jijber (present-day Shabshir), a village in the southwest portion of the Nile delta and, therefore, was a child during the Great Persecution (306 -311) and a teenager when Constantine promulgated the Edict of Toleration in 313. As a young man he was a camel driver; as part of his job as a gatherer of natron, he may have visited the Wadi al-Natrun, his future monastic home. Still a young man, he became a village ascetic or anchorite, like Saint Antony and others before him.

About 330 Macarius went to the Wadi al-Natrun (Scetis), southwest of the Nile delta, about the same time that Amoun was founding a monastic settlement just to the north in Nitria. Settling eventually near the site of the present day monastery named in his honor, Deir Anba Maqar, Macarius at first lived alone: "When Abba Macarius dwelt in the great desert, he was the only one living as an anchorite, but lower down there was another desert where several brothers dwelt." Soon, however, he began to attract disciples and a small community formed around him. By 340 a growing monastic settlement was solidly in place in Scetis; a mere sixteen years later, Abba Sisoës would leave Scetis for remoter regions, complaining that it was now too crowded. Little more, however, is known for sure of either Macarius or his community at this time. Macarius apparently was made a priest ten years after coming to the Wadi al-Natrun. He was deported during the Arian persecution in 374 to an island in the delta, returned some time later to Scetis, and died about 390. As with other monastic saints, his body underwent numerous adventures and movings about, coming to rest finally at Deir Anba Maqar, where it is venerated today.

Macarius came to preside, in a loose manner, over the monks of Scetis. These monks were semi-anchoretic; that is, they lived alone or in small groups in scattered cells, and came together as a larger community usually only on Saturday and Sunday, when they celebrated the Eucharist together and participated in a communal meal. We should not impose later structures, either architectural or monastic, on these monks: the monastic enclosure, with its high defensive walls, would not be the rule until the ninth century, and the rules and regulations of medieval, Benedictine, monasticism, much less the ways of modern orders, were unknown to them. The best way to understand these early monks, in any case, is not historically, but spiritually, through their thought and practices; the Sayings of the desert fathers and mothers offer the best access to their world.



At their best, the early monks simplified the spiritual life to work and prayer, and erected no boundaries between these two, seeing them as integral parts of life in God. In the same way, they numbered their spiritual precepts as two or three and not in the thousands: "Do no evil to anyone, and do not judge anyone. Observe this and you will be saved," offered Macarius. Macarius taught that prayer did not require "long discourses; it is enough to stretch out one's hands and say, 'Lord, as you will, and as you know, have mercy.' And if the conflict grows fiercer say, 'Lord, help!'" The monk was to become "a dead man." When a brother asked Macarius how to be saved, he told the monk to go to the cemetery and insult the dead; when the brother reported that he had done as he was told, Macarius then told him to go praise the dead. When the monk returned again, Macarius asked him, "Did they answer you?" When the monk said no, Macarius drove home his point: "You know how you insulted them and they did not reply, and how you praised them and they did not speak; so you too if you wish to be saved must do the same and become a dead man. Like the dead, take no account of either the scorn of men or their praises, and you can be saved."

Such advice as Macarius gave to that monk might seem unrealistic to us today, but it is unrealistic in precisely the way that the Sermon on the Mount is "unrealistic": that is, it challenges us so profoundly that our usual defense is to dismiss it. In the same way, Macarius's actions are impossible, just as Jesus' are impossible. But Macarius, like Jesus, was known for his wonderworking: "The Egyptian had acquired such a reputation that he always had a disciple with him to receive 'clients' 'on account of the number of those who came to be healed by him.'" One day Macarius discovered a man plundering his goods, "so he came up to the thief as if he was a stranger and he helped him to load the animal. He saw him off in great peace of soul." Strange? Yes. But less strange, perhaps, than someone today watching, with fear and trembling, as the stock market plummets five hundred points one day and rockets up three hundred the next, and calling such a life "normal."

It is worth noting that Macarius assists his thieves while quoting scripture: "We have brought nothing into this world, and we cannot take anything out of the world" (1 Tim 6:7). As a Baptist preacher once told me, "The hearse don't have no U-Haul following' behind it." Macarius, it seems, tried to live (or die) this understanding each day. Such detachment, ancient monasticism shows again and again, can lead to real peace. One time when Macarius visited Antony, the two stayed up all night praying and plaiting rope; in the morning, the rope that Macarius was making trailed all the way out the window and down into the cave. Antony admired its length and exclaimed, "Great power comes from these hands!" Macarius, and the other monks of the desert, still have the power to offer us insight about being human

Another time a demon approached Abba Macarius with a knife and wanted to cut his foot. But because of his [Macarius's] humility he could not do so, and he said to Macarius, "All that you have, we have also; yon are distinguished from us only by humility; by that yon get the better of us."

(By: Vivian, Tim "The good God, the holy power, and the paraclete"

Anglican Theological Review, Summer 98, Vol. 80, Issue 3)



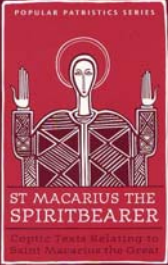
1st Anniversary of the Ordination of the Fathers



On Sunday 15th of May the monastery celebrated the 1st anniversary of the ordination of Fr Shenouda and Fr Theodore into the priesthood. It is also the Fr Wissa's 1st Anniversary of his elevation to the rank of Hegumen.

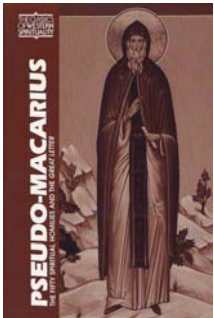
We wish our dear fathers many prosperous years to come.

Further readings



Tim Vivian, *St Macarius the Spiritbearer: Coptic Text relating to St Macarius the Great.*

These three ancient texts—*The Sayings of Saint Macarius*, *The Virtues of Saint Macarius*, and *The Life of Saint Macarius of Scetis*—provide insight into one of the most venerated saints of the Coptic Church and into life in the Egyptian monastic communities of the fourth century.



George A. Maloney, S.J., *Pseudo-Macarius: The Fifty spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter.*

The Fifty Homilies, in the form of a practical, monastic pedagogy, reveal the typical traits of Eastern Christian asceticism, with particular emphasis on the spiritual combat, the action of the Holy Spirit, and the importance of interior prayer. The *Great Letter* discusses the purging of the passions to bring the Christian into a state of tranquility and integration, and addresses the monastic community with instructions regarding organisation, humility, and prayer.