

**On the 19th January, the holy Church commemorates
our venerable Father MAKARIOS the Great,
Anchorite of Egypt.¹**

Makarios the Great, who was from the Thebaid of Egypt, has a contemporary of the same name who was known as Makarios the citizen of Alexandria. Both holy fathers are commemorated by the holy Church today. They were close friends and disciples of Saint Anthony the Great. The biography of Makarios the citizen, who was priest in a monastery in the desert of Kellia (Cellia) which adjoined Sketis (Wadi el-Natrun), shall follow the present account of Makarios the Great.

Makarios of Egypt was born about the year 301. Since he loved virtue from an early age, when a firm foundation in piety was laid, he conducted his entire life in a manner blameless and irreproachable. When he reached twenty years of age, though according to other accounts he was thirty years old, he withdrew from the world. The ever-memorable one demonstrated such endurance and patience in ascetic toils and hardships that in a few years he was vouchsafed to receive the gift of discernment. He also attained authority and power over demons, foretold the future, and wrought miracles. When still a young man, he was called "the boy elder" or "the youth elder." It is said by some that he was a disciple of Anthony the Great. After many supplica-

¹ The Life of Saint Makarios of Egypt was recorded in Greek by Saint Symeon the Metaphrastes. The text was rendered in simpler Greek by Agapios the Cretan, who published it in the *Eklogion*. This same saint was known as "the Great." He attained to the measure of his abba, the great Anthony, assimilated his teachings, and recorded his own meditations in his work, entitled *Fifty Spiritual Homilies*. His writings speak chiefly of divinization and communion with God. Together with his *Homilies*, there are seven *Ascetic Treatises*.

Saint Makarios the Great also penned several prayers which have entered into Orthodox Church usage: From the "Prayers Before Sleep," the first prayer, "O eternal God;" and, the fourth, "What shall I offer Thee." And, from the "Morning Prayers," the first prayer, "O Lord, cleanse me"; the second, "Having risen from sleep"; the third, "To Thee, O Lord"; the fourth, "O Lord, Who in Thine abundant goodness"; and, according to Greek manuscripts, the ninth also, "O holy Angel." His works have been translated into English. See *Fifty Spiritual Homilies: Macarius the Great*, translated by A. J. Mason, Willits, CA: Eastern Orthodox Books, 1974; and, *The Fifty Spiritual Homilies and the Great Letter*, translated by George A. Maloney, NY/NJ: Paulist Press, 1992.

A service to Saint Makarios of Egypt was composed by Father Gerasimos Mikrayiannanites. Father Gerasimos also composed one service to all four famous fathers having the same name: Makarios of Egypt, Makarios of Alexandria, Makarios of Rome, and Makarios of Corinth.

tions by the bishop, who could not bear to see the lamp hidden under the bushel, he received the rank of the priesthood. He was then forty years of age.



Saint Makarios the Great

Our venerable father had two disciples. One of them abided with the elder in order to take in the sick for safekeeping, whom he brought daily before Makarios that he might treat and heal them. The other disciple sojourned in another cell found far distant. Now the righteous one observed that his subordinate, who was in obedience to him, received silver from the infirm. He forewarned his disciple that if he should choose not to correct himself, he would be the recipient of wrath and chastisement from the Lord. Indeed, this disclosure of the future became reality,

since that same brother did not amend his ways, and was rendered a leper.

At one time they were trying to bring to the holy man a certain youth who was possessed by a legion of demons. At times he could not be satiated, but at other times he discharged his food as though a fire were in his belly. Then again, at other times his stomach emitted a foul stench. Sometimes, if he had no bread to eat, the wretched man ate his own dung. The mother of this youth came and fell before the feet of the venerable elder. With ardent tears she entreated Makarios to cure her son, knowing him to be a sympathetic elder. Thereupon, the saint offered up prayer for seven days. At the end of this time he gave the youth back to his mother healed and possessed of a sound mind. The youth thereafter partook only of thirty-six ounces of bread daily.

At one time there was a man who was slain secretly. When the body was found and the murderer unknown, an innocent man was pronounced guilty. Knowing that they intended to deliver him up to the authorities in order to punish him, the innocent man fled arrest and took refuge at the cell of our holy Father Makarios. The soldiers, hastening, pursued him there, and placed

him in bonds. The innocent man let out loud cries and shouts, swearing his innocence. The saint pitied him and went to the grave of the murder victim, accompanied by all the people present. Makarios fell to his knees, so as to pray, saying to the bystanders, "The Lord now doth wish to make manifest to you if this man is guilty." With faith, the saint cried out to the dead man, saying, "I adjure thee by the Master Christ, to tell us the truth, whether this man who stands accused murdered thee?" The dead man—O the wonder!—as though he were only asleep, was roused and answered him, "No, honorable father, this one is not at fault, but another murdered me." After the bystanders heard this declaration, they feared and trembled. They therefore besought the saint to question him again and ask who had slain him. The all-wise elder said to them, "It is enough that I established this man as innocent and that you desist from punishing him. But I am not a judge to punish the transgressor."

Palladius narrates the following account of righteous Makarios the Egyptian. A certain intemperate man sought to draw a prudent maiden into a satanic love. Unable to attract her, he resorted to diabolical magic that she might appear as a mare to the people. Her parents went and took refuge in Makarios, saying, "This mare that we have led forth to thy holiness was our daughter. And by the sorceries of a certain man she was transformed into this shape. Therefore, we beseech thee to entreat the Lord, so as to return her to her former state." The saint answered, "As for me, I behold a woman and not a mare, as you declare. This transformation is not to her body, but only to your eyes. It is a delusion of the devil." After he had said this, they took the maiden into his cell, where he made a prayer and anointed her with holy oil. Henceforth she again appeared to all who beheld her as a woman by nature, since through the entreaty of Makarios the apparition vanished.

At a later time they brought another maiden who had a dread illness which caused her flesh to putrefy and emit an incomparably foul stench. Makarios spoke to her, saying, "Keep on having patience, daughter; God has allowed this illness for the benefit of thy soul." The holy man then offered up prayers for her sake during the next seven days. At the same time, he anointed her with holy oil. He cured her completely, and all were amazed.

One day, Makarios in the company of Abba Sisoës and five other monks went to harvest in the cool of the morning dew. Now a certain woman followed them and collected the ears of grain which remained, but all the while she was weeping and sighing bitterly. The venerable elder questioned the master of the field, "What has taken hold of this woman and afflicted her so?" He replied that she was a widow whose late husband, when he was living, was entrusted with a valuable deposit by a certain man. Thereafter, her husband suddenly reposed, never speaking of the matter to her. Thereupon, the owner had the woman summoned to court. Since she was poor, he sought

to hold in servitude both the woman and her children. Makarios was moved to sympathy at the suffering widow's plight. He repaired to the grave of her husband, where he inquired of the dead man, "Where hast thou concealed the deposit?" O Thy wonders, Christ King! He answered that he hid it by burying it beneath the foot of his bed. The saint related this to the woman, who in turn found the deposit. She handed it over to the rightful owner and was thereafter left untroubled.

The venerable man was so patient and persevering in fasting and continence that for twenty years he never satiated himself with bread or water or sleep; but daily, he ate according to a set weight in ounces, together with three cups of water. While leaning against a wall, he slept a little lest he should injure his mind from much vigil and excessive hardship. Whenever the brethren came to see him, he sat down with them at table, eating and drinking, in order to flee pretentiousness. But when his guests departed, depending on how many cups of water or wine he partook of, he would then deprive himself of water for such a number of days. He did this so he might bring his flesh under subjection. This observance alone, with regard to his body, bears witness of the extreme continence he practised.

On a certain day the holy Makarios went to visit Saint Anthony the Great. He knocked at the door, and Anthony from within asked who it was and what he sought. Makarios answered, "It is your countryman Makarios, and I came to speak with thee." The great Anthony, wishing to prove Makarios' patience, secured the door further. Despite this seeming discourtesy, Makarios was not offended, but stood patiently and meekly outside for a long time. Thereupon, Anthony, perceiving Makarios' marvellous patience, opened the door and received him rejoicing, saying, "It is a long while that I have heard of thy good fame. I had a great desire to behold thee. Glory be to the Lord Who fulfilled my desire!" After they greeted and embraced one another in the Lord, Anthony laid a table, and they became fast friends. After he had said the prayer of thanksgiving, Anthony took up his handiwork of weaving palms, lest he should sit idle as he conversed to the benefit of the soul. Now Makarios requested that he himself might perform a little handiwork. After the great Anthony observed how he wove most beautifully in a row, he kissed Makarios' hands, saying, "These blessed hands are full of much kindness and virtue."

After these events, Makarios returned again to his cell and gave himself to contemplation, so that his mind and soul were most of the time in the heavens rather than on the earth. Therefore, in order to attain greater attention toward God, he opened underneath his cell a subterranean chamber. He then dug out for a distance of one-half a stadium or about three hundred and three English feet. The passageway, as a spiral shell, had turns hither and

thither; but, at the end, he dug out a cave with his own hands. When many people came and troubled him, he passed over secretly by means of the underground stoa and concealed himself inside the cave. Then, no one was able to find him.

At another time, during a certain feast day, he repaired to the Mount of Nitria, where he went to the monastery of Abba Pambo, who is commemorated by the holy Church on the 18th of July. The monks there besought him to teach them with a view to spiritual benefit. As one humble-minded, Makarios answered, saying, "I am not yet a monk; however, I saw some monks, and on account of them I shall speak to you of a few things toward edification." He began to say the following:

"Once, while sitting in my cell, a thought gave me warfare, which said, 'Arise and get thee to the desert.' And I, fearing that perhaps this was a demonic suggestion, in order to confound and agitate my silence, warred against this thought for five years. After I perceived that my thought remained steadfast, I came to the knowledge that it was from God. I hearkened and obeyed, walking about a long way into the desert. I found a lake at which wild beasts and other creatures came and drank water. In the midst of the creatures, I observed two hirsute men. I felt frightened and fainthearted, presuming that they were demons. Beholding my terror, they spoke to me, saying, 'Cease fearing, for we are men also.' Consequently, I was filled with fresh courage and drew closer to them. I inquired of them where they were from and how they managed to support themselves. 'We, O brother, persevered in one monastery. And after we received forgiveness and consent from the hegumen and the other brethren, we took our leave. We came to this desert, where we have already sojourned in silence for some forty years. One of us is from Libya, and the other from Egypt. The Lord has graciously bestowed upon us the gift that we should feel neither the burning summer heat nor the winter cold.'" Saint Makarios then broke off his account, and said to the monks of Abba Pambo's monastery, "For this cause, brothers, I told you that I am not yet a monk."

At another time again, while the righteous one was on the road coming from Sketis, night overtook him. He therefore entered one of the sepulchers of the idolaters that he might sleep for the night. He took up the skull of one of the deceased and used it as a cushion for his head. Now the demons bore Makarios much malice, because he did not frighten when they attempted to make him act cowardly. At that time, Makarios was hearing one of them saying to some woman who was laid in the tomb, "Bestir thyself, O woman, let us be off to the bath that we may work." And another demon answered from the skull used as Makarios' pillow, saying, "One foreign abba has me as a cushion, and I am not able to go forth." Despite all this chatter,



Saint Makarios and the Skull

the holy man did not fear, but was saying, "If thou art able to rise up, go thy way." Put to shame, the demons then fled and said, "Thou hast prevailed over us, O Makarios!"

Once, a certain heretic went to the saint and contended that there was no resurrection of the dead. Therefore, the great Makarios raised a dead man in order to persuade and fully assure the heretic. The resurrected man was a pagan Greek who came to believe in Christ and was baptized. He then became a monk, taking the name of Miles.

At another time, the venerable elder was saying that there are two orders of demons. The one order wages wars against humans in diverse ways, by means of the passions of anger and desire. The other order, which is named "the ruling order," contends against the people and casts them into various heresies, blasphemies, and errors. Satan, the leader of this order of demons, sends his minions to sorcerers and to heresiarchs.

One time the saint saw the devil having his contrivances and tools inside a casket used for unguents. Makarios observed that he was sitting down quietly, having taken the form of a man dressed in linen. His garment revealed many holes, and from each opening there was hanging one small gourd. The holy man asked him whither he would go and what was he holding in the vessels. The devil gave answer, "I am going to the monastics who hold out in the lower gorge. I am bearing different drinks, in order that each of them may drink for whatever he yearns." After he disclosed these things, the demon vanished. The elder remained in that place, offering up prayer that he might see the outcome. When the demon returned, Makarios asked him what he wrought at the monastery. He replied that he prevailed only over one monk, but the rest fought courageously. The saint said, "I adjure thee by the Master Christ, that thou tellest me the name of the monk whom thou didst overtake." The demon said, "He is named Theopemptos."

After hearing this, the saint went to the aforementioned monastery. All the brethren received Abba Makarios with reverence. The holy man then inquired, "In which cell might I find Theopemptos?" After he learned where

Theopemptos was located, he went to him. He questioned him regarding spiritual things and how he was faring in the spiritual life. Keeping his reply short and restricted, Theopemptos answered, "Well, with the power of God, father." The most wise Makarios, perceiving he was ashamed to confess his sin, as a practical and effective physician, in a skilled manner, said, "I, the wretched one, though I have so many years in the desert and though I have acquired such a celebrated name, yet again am unable to flee shameful and sordid thoughts. If the Lord did not help me, I should be in danger of being conquered." Upon hearing these frank words, Theopemptos took courage and confessed the truth, saying, "I also, honorable father, am suffering in like manner, and am in danger of death!" Then the spiritual physician explained what Theopemptos should practise and how much he should fast. He expounded on how to pray in order to prevail against the one who tempts him. After he had corrected him as was meet, he returned to his own cell. A certain number of days later, Makarios saw the same demon, as he was returning from the monastery with the gourds. Makarios inquired how he passed his time with the monks. "Badly and with reverses," said he, "inasmuch as all fought against me, and more so did Theopemptos resist, he whom I had for my friend! I do not know what happened and how he became the harshest toward me!" Thus, the great knowledge and virtue of Makarios delivered Theopemptos out of danger.



Saint Makarios of Egypt

Once the saint was returning from out of Egypt. He went to his cell and found thieves who were taking whatever Makarios possessed. Now just as he arrived, they were loading the donkey. Makarios feigned that they were not his own things. Thereupon, he not only did not speak badly to them, but he even helped them to load his belongings. He then uttered, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the Lord gave,

and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord [Job 1:21].” Saying these things, he was able to abide undistressed at the deprivation of his possessions.

Not only did Makarios endure this loss of his few possessions with long-suffering, but even earlier in his life, as a young man in the coenobium, he endured a terrible slander. Harken to this account, though the charge was false. Now Makarios neither pleaded any excuse nor shuffled about when the accusation was laid at his door. But for the sake of the love of God he remained silent. Later, when the truth came to be known, he was marvelled at even more. This incident took place thus, even as Makarios himself narrated with these very words: “When I was a beginner in the monastery, they were intending to ordain me as a deacon, though I had no wish for this. Now I adjudged myself unworthy, so I fled from the lavra to a hidden place, where a layman attended to me. He would take my handiwork, plaited hand-baskets; and, in exchange for these wares, he brought me food. There happened to be in those parts a maiden who fell into sin with a certain man. Consequently, that foolhardy girl came to be with child. Her parents questioned her about the matter, and the devil advised her to say that I ravaged her. Her parents, filled with wrath, hastened to me and seized me as wild beasts. They hung clay vessels all over my body in order to show their scorn and contempt. They struck me mercilessly, making me a spectacle and putting me to shame. They kept on shouting aloud throughout those parts, ‘This monk overpowered our daughter.’ Even the layman who attended me they subjected to insult, saying, ‘Behold what has been accomplished by the virtuous monk whom thou didst laud so highly! Indeed, all thy words to us falsely represented him as a holy man. But know this: we shall not leave him until he should remit all the expenses and the future support of the child that she shall bear, because he corrupted her virginity!’

“Then I made a gesture, motioning the layman that he might become my guarantor without drawing back. He accepted and took me, half-dead though I was, from their hands. Arriving at my cell, I recovered somewhat and set about weaving, saying, ‘Work, lowly Makarios, that thou mightest feed the woman and thyself.’ Thus, I toiled night and day. I gave my straw baskets to that layman that I might feed that pitiful woman. When the time of her giving birth arrived, she remained in painful labor for many days. But the unfortunate one was unable to deliver the infant. By means of those birth pangs, which put her life and soul in peril, she acknowledged her sin. She confessed to those present the truth and said, ‘I suffer now justifiably; for I, the unjust one, slandered that virtuous man, the monk, saying that he forced himself upon me. Know in truth that I sinned with that other man, my neighbor.’ Having spoken thus, the woman was finally delivered of her

womb's burden, suffered no complications. Those present came running to me. They shed tears and begged my forgiveness. Henceforth, they greatly revered me. Then I, in order to escape the praise of men, fled from that place and came to this desert."

Makarios the Great was once asked which way is the easiest to be saved. he replied, "Whosoever leaves the world and goes to a quiet place and cries over his sins finds his salvation."

Once, as Saint Makarios was returning to his cell from another place, he met the devil coming toward him with vehemence, carrying a sickle and making gestures to cut and slay him. But that weak creature was incapable of doing anything to the holy man. Explaining his action, the devil said, "I suffer greatly due to thee, Makarios. I never manage to defeat thee, even if I exceed thee in certain excellences. Though thou dost fast on certain days, yet I never eat. Though thou keepest vigil, yet I never sleep. Nevertheless, there is one virtue in which thou dost excel me, on account of which I exercise no power over thee." The saint asked, "What might that be?" Hurriedly, the devil replied, "Humility." Then that foul creature vanished.

A virtuous Egyptian man had a paralyzed son who could in no wise move his limbs. He lay abed as still as a rock. The father took his ailing son and quietly deposited him outside the cell door of Saint Makarios. He then departed in silence. When the abba emerged from his cell and beheld the young man, he queried, "Who has brought thee here?" The young man answered, "My father has lain me here and left." The saint then said to him, "Rise up and overtake him!" Immediately—lo the miracle!—the formerly motionless one arose, venerated the physician, and returned to his home rejoicing.

It is said that the heavenly Makarios spent more time during his early sojourn contemplating noetic union with God than giving thought to the things of this world which is under the heavens.



Saint Makarios the Great

With such wondrous and God-pleasing labors did the great Makarios, whose name means "blessed," shine forth. Saint Makarios went forth to the Lord in the year 391 at the age of ninety, though some claim he was sixty years of age. He has left for us his wise *Fifty Homilies*, which some maintain that the great Anthony authored in the Syriac, but which the venerable Makarios translated into the Greek tongue.

**On the 19th of January, the holy Church commemorates
our holy Father MAKARIOS of Alexandria,
known as the citizen.²**

Makarios, our venerable father of Alexandria, was also surnamed "politikos" or "citizen." He had been a shopkeeper in Alexandria, providing cakes and dried fruit to the public. At the age of forty, he received holy Baptism. He thereafter renounced the world and retired from city life to the desert of the Cells (Cellia, Kellia)³ between Nitria and Sketis.⁴ He became a good friend of the venerable Makarios the Egyptian. Together, they were disciples of Saint Anthony the Great. With the other fathers of the desert, he suffered persecution at the hands of the Arians.

Makarios the Alexandrian attained to the height of self-mastery, continence, and patience. Since he had spent most of his life in the city as a civilian and was very familiar with a citizen's everyday life in the community, he was made a priest for the brethren of the Cells. His broad background and general knowledge in dealing with all kinds of people was perceived as useful for the correction and exhortation of the brethren. As for himself, whensoever he heard of any beautiful deed or extraordinary act of asceticism, he would

² In 390 or 391, when Palladius went to Cellia, where he sojourned for nine years, he met with Abba Makarios the Alexandrian, and wrote of him in *The Lausiak History*, § 18. A service to Saint Makarios of Alexandria was composed by Father Gerasimos Mikrayiannanites.

³ The Cells had become a settlement of some six hundred anchorites. Their cells were out of earshot of one another. As they were scattered over a wide area, some of the residents had to travel as much as three miles to church. They had their own priest and church. They were dependent on Nitria for bread. See D. J. Chitty, *The Desert a City*, p. 29.

⁴ The Wadi-el-Natrun is the Desert of Sketis. Nitria, as Palladius tells us, is some forty miles away, and was approachable in his day by boat from Alexandria. The term "Sketis" is sometimes used to cover Nitria as well, but the term "Nitria" is never used to cover "Sketis." The natural approach to Sketis is not from Nitria, but from the nearest point on the Canopic branch of the Nile at Terenuthis, some twenty miles away. *Ibid.*, p. 12.