

outside of the city. The pagans further thrashed and wounded him with sharp reeds. He was then taken and cast into the prison. It was there that Hyacinth surrendered his soul into the hands of God.

In commemoration of this saint, we shall recount this miracle that occurred after his repose. His grave, which was underground, contained his honorable relics. When the Christians gathered around his tomb at his yearly celebration, they would chant hymns. At the commencement of the singing, water would gush forth from the ground below his grave. The bishop collected the holy water in a jar, after which he distributed it for all the Christians to drink. Diseases of both body and soul were healed by the intercessions of Saint Hyacinth.

**On the 18th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Martyr MARKELLOS,
who suffered martyrdom when he was
stretched out on a burning bed of fire.**

**On the 18th of July, the holy Church commemorates
the holy Martyrs DASIOS and MARON,
who were slain by the sword.**

**On the 18th of July, the holy Church commemorates
our venerable Father PAMBO.**

Pambo (or Panbis), the great and venerable Egyptian desert father, was born in 303. He was one of the first to join Abba Ammoun in Nitria.⁹

⁹ Saint Ammoun is commemorated by the holy Church on the 4th of October. See article by Jimmy Dunn, entitled "Christian Nitria, Kellia and the Life of their Ancient Monks," at <http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/kellia.htm>. "Abba Ammoun (Ammon, Amun) was the founder of Nitria and Kellia (Cells). He withdrew to Nitria where he established his first true colony of anchorites in about 330. On account of his holy nature and charismatic personality, this community quickly grew in size.

"Nitria itself probably lies under the modern village of el-Barnudj in the upper eastern delta. The unknown author of the *History of the Egyptian Monks* (*Historia Monachorum in Aegypto*), visited the area at the end of the 4th C. He tells us: 'Then we came to Nitria, the best-known of all monasteries of Egypt, about forty miles from Alexandria; it takes its name from a nearby town where nitre [the mineral form of potassium nitrate (saltpetre)] is collected....In this place there are about fifty dwellings, or not many less, set near together and under one father. In some of them, there are many living together, in others a few and in some there are brothers who live alone. Though they are divided by their dwellings they remain bound together and inseparable in faith and love.'

He, too, with his abba, suffered persecution at Nitria from the Arians. He, therefore, struggled in asceticism on Mount Nitria. Though at first he was an illiterate monk, yet he eventually was taught letters. At length, in the year 340, he was ordained a priest. He was the abba of Bishop Dioskoros, and of Ammonos, as well as of John the nephew of the marvellous Drakontios.¹⁰ Saint Jerome counted Pambo, together with Makarios and Isidore, as one of the masters of the desert.

The fathers were wont to say that the countenance of Abba Pambo was as lightning, even as the face of Moses was glorified,¹¹ so that he was like a king sitting on his throne.¹² Despite the fame he acquired, he habitually said for three years: "O God, do not glorify me on earth." But God did glorify His slave, so that no one could look steadfastly into his face because of the glory

⁹(...continued)

"Another early visitor to the monastery was Palladius (ca. 365-425), a historian of early monasticism, who wrote *Lausiac History* (*Historia Lausiaca*), and who tells us that: 'I...crossed over to Mount Nitria. Between this mountain and Alexandria there lies a lake called Marea seventy miles long. I was a day and a half crossing this to the mountain on its southern shore. Beyond the mountain stretches the great desert reaching as far as Ethiopia, Mazicae, and Mauritania. On the mountain live close to five thousand men following different ways of life, each as he can or will. Thus some live alone, others in pairs, and some in groups. There are seven bakeries on this mountain serving these men as well as the anchorites of the Great Desert, six hundred in all...On this mountain of Nitria there is a great church....The guesthouse is close to the church....All work with their hands at making linen, so that none of them is in want. And indeed, about the ninth hour one can stand and hear the divine psalmody issuing forth from each cell and imagine one is high above in Paradise. They occupy the church on Saturdays and Sundays only. Eight priests have charge of the church; while the senior priest lives, none of the others celebrates or gives the sermon, but they simply sit quietly by him.'"

¹⁰ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek). See also *Lausiac History*, Ch. X. Palladius (Palladius) puts Abba Pambo's repose in 393, others in 374, writing that "he was the teacher and master of the Bishops Dioscorus, Ammonius, Eusebius, Euthymius, and Origen the nephew of Dracontius, a marvellous man." "The History of the Blessed Man Pambo, by Palladius," *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, Vol. I, p. 103. Derwas J. Chitty [*The Desert a City* (Crestwood, NY: SVS Press, 1966), p. 46] identifies the brothers as the four Tall Brothers (Dioscorus, Ammonius, Eusebius, and Euthymius), who were given sanctuary by Saint John Chrysostom when they fled Egypt and Patriarch Theophilus.

¹¹ Ex. 34:29.

¹² "Of the Fathers Who Wrought Wonders," ¶ 621, *Paradise*, II:144.

of his countenance.¹³ When our holy father among the saints, Abba Sisoës,¹⁴ was asked about Abba Pambo, he commented: "Abba Pambo is great in his works."¹⁵ When the great Anthony¹⁶ was asked by Abba Poemen regarding Abba Pambo, Saint Anthony said, "This man possessed the fear of God to such an extent that he has become a dwelling place of the Holy Spirit."¹⁷

Saint Athanasios the Great, Pope of Alexandria (first elected in 328),¹⁸ invited Abba Pambo to visit him in the city. The abba obeyed and came down from the desert sands of Nitria to bustling Alexandria. On his way to see the patriarch, he encountered an actress who was bedecked. He wept when he clapped his eyes on her. Those in his company asked the reason for his shedding tears. He replied honestly, "Two things have caused tears to well up and flow abundantly: one, the loss of this woman; and two, that I am not so occupied with pleasing God as she is with pleasing lewd men."¹⁹

The Value of the Love of Silence

The particular characteristic of Abba Pambo was his love of keeping silence. He exercised control of the tongue, by either maintaining silence or speaking only after careful consideration. To more polished folks, his pointed brusqueness sounded even discourteous. But from the beginning of his monasticism, he trained himself to speak little. When he did speak his mouth spoke wisdom. How did he develop this taciturnity? His own abba inaugurated his monastic life with the opening verse of this psalm of David: "I said, 'I will take heed to my ways lest I sin with my tongue [Ps. 38:1].'" Pambo said, "That suffices for me today. I shall ponder upon it." After he meditated upon that single text for six months, practising it with diligence, he took up his next lesson.²⁰

A brother monastic asked Abba Pambo, "Is it good to praise one's neighbor?" The abba answered, "It is much better for one to hold his peace."²¹

¹³ "Pi for Pambo," ¶ 1, *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*, trans. by Benedicta Ward (Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1975), p. 164.

¹⁴ Saint Sisoës is commemorated by the holy Church on the 6th of July.

¹⁵ "Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule," ¶ 93, *Paradise*, II:175.

¹⁶ Saint Anthony is commemorated by the holy Church on the 18th of January.

¹⁷ "Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule," ¶ 135, *Paradise*, II:183.

¹⁸ Saint Athanasios, born in Alexandria in 295, had been unjustly deposed and exiled five times: 335, 339, 356, 362, and 365. He reposed in 373. He is commemorated by the holy Church on the 18th of January and the 2nd of May.

¹⁹ "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 4, p. 165.

²⁰ Alban Butler's *Lives of the Saints*, s.v. "July 18th."

²¹ "A Retreat from the World and Contemplation," ¶ 49, *Paradise*, II:13.

The abba once said, "By the grace of God, since I left the world, I have not uttered one word for which I afterward repented."²²

When Archbishop Theophilos of Alexandria (385-412) was visiting Sketis on one of his pastoral rounds, the brethren spoke to Abba Pambo with some urgency and said, "Speak a word to the pope that we may be set up and supported in this place." Pambo remarked, "If by my silence we are not aided, neither shall my word avail anything."²³

The Value of Apparel to a Monk

Abba Isaac, the priest of the Cells (Kellia), used to quote Abba Pambo who said, "A monk's apparel should be such that if it were cast outside for three days no one would snatch it." Isaac continued, saying, "Our fathers and Abba Pambo were wont to wear old garments, which garb not only showed much mending but also used rags for patches."²⁴ It is worth noting here that the founding of Kellia occurred circa 338. Kellia was actually a huge area of monastic settlements located not far from Nitria.²⁵

²² "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 5, loc. cit.

²³ "The Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule," ¶ 182, *Paradise*, II:194.

²⁴ "Of Voluntary Poverty," ¶¶ 168, 176, *Paradise*, II:37, 39.

²⁵ "The fall of Nitria probably took place in the latter half of the 7th C. When Patriarch Benjamin I passed through the area on his way to Scetis (Wadi al-Natrun), Nitria was completely deserted. The sand and wind of the desert, and more recently, the reclamation and irrigation projects have erased the remains of this monastic settlement. However, at its peak, the overcrowding of the Nitria monastery apparently forced Amun to create a second region of settlements, which has survived to some extent, and is better known to us.

"Kellia (Cellia, the Cells), though not really all that well known to the general public, is perhaps one of the most important Christian archaeological sites in the world. These ruins inform us of the evolution of monastery life from its very roots through early maturity, giving us insights into both the monk's life and their early, but sophisticated, Christian art.... The ruins are located not far from Nitria on a straight line connecting Damanhur to Sadat City. Though a considerable number of these ruins have succumbed to the incursion of agricultural and irrigation projects, there have been identified some sixteen hundred monastic settlements in an area of approximately one hundred square kilometers that were built over a period of less than three hundred years, beginning about the middle of the 4th C. (and ending about the first half of the 7th C.). One must truly wonder about the extent of these ruins for their Koms (rubble hills) are spread amongst five primary areas, consisting of Qusur al-Rubaiyat, Qusur al-Izayla, Qusur Isa, Qusur al-Higayla, Qusur al-Arayma and Qasr Waheida. This archaeological site, first discovered by Professor Antoine Guillaumont of Paris in the spring of 1964 (excavation by a French-Swiss team followed under the direction of Professor Rodolphe Kasser of Geneva), extends some eleven kilometers in length and two kilometers in width. The ruins are reached by traveling out of Dilingat west over

(continued...)

The Value of Obedience

On one occasion, four brethren clad in skins came from Sketis to visit the venerable Pambo. Each of the four had a private interview with the abba. Each recounted to Pambo his manner of living. The first brother declared that he exercised frequent abstinence. The second claimed to live a life of poverty.

²⁵(...continued)

the bridge on the Nubariya Canal where one takes an unpaved road, just before the railroad tracks, to the right. The ruins begin only a few kilometers down this road.

"We find that Kellia had a church and refectory. At Qusur Isa and Qasr Waheida, archaeologists have unearthed two such complexes of particular interest. There are churches that date to the 5th C. While these churches are fairly ordinary for their time, they reveal to us, along with much evidence from the hermitages, the evolution of the early monk's way of life. We know, for example, that these complexes where the early monks came together on Saturdays and Sundays were eventually abandoned in favor of places of worship attached to the hermitages themselves, hence making the hermitages true monasteries, but also informing us that the monks were evolving toward a more communal life style.

"Perhaps most interesting is the evolution of the Kellia structures, reflecting not simply modernization over the three-hundred-year building span but also alterations within the monastic community. Remains of the oldest, mid-4th through 5th C. have simple, poor architectural elements consisting of tiny rooms and sometimes single cells, partially hollowed in the earth and covered by a vault. Spare lodging was sometimes provided within an enclosure wall. However, by the end of the 5th C., the hermitages become more elaborate, reflecting a change in the founders' conception of anchoritic life. After the 5th C. we find increased facilities to receive others, where once the dwellings were built to isolate their inhabitants. We see an evolution in the individual hermitages that first allow several monks shelter; and, by the end of the 7th C., we find large rooms that might accommodate a small anchoritic colony. Clearly, the solitude of the lone monk in the early phase of Kellia gave way to a semi-communal life.

"As might be expected in a country with few trees, only the doors of the hermitages were made of wood, while the remaining structure was built mostly of earth, usually in the form of unbaked mudbrick. Mudbrick structures were built throughout Egypt and from very ancient times was a primary building material in secular construction, as well as some religious buildings. However, most of the mudbrick constructs in the Nile Valley quickly fell into ruin. In the desert, these buildings fare better; and in the case of the Kellia, even though the brick was unbaked, it is of a particularly fine quality. The presence of water a few meters under the sand and the rocky material called *gebal* in Arabic, which is composed of extremely fine particles and more granular components bonded by mineral salts creates an ideal condition for the stability of these bricks in a dry climate. Interestingly, a strict code seems to have been applied to the size of the bricks, which were always either 20 x 40 x 7 or 40 x 40 x 7 centimeters." J. Dunn, "Christian Nitria, Kellia and the Life of their Ancient Monks."

The third stated he possessed great love and charity. The fourth brother recounted that "I have been in subjection to the old men for twenty-two years." When the four of them were together before Pambo, the latter remarked while indicating the fourth brother, "The spiritual excellence of this man is great." Then directing his gaze at the first three monks, he said, "Each of you has chosen the ascetic virtue according to his own desire. But this brother has cut off his own will and desire. He restrains his own will and performs the will of others. Those who are thus, if they should preserve obedience to the end, will become confessors; that is to say, it is of such men that the martyrs are made, if they persevere to the end."²⁶

The Value of a Good Conscience for a Monk

On another occasion, some of the brethren came to visit Abba Pambo. One of them posed this question: "I keep a fast for two days at a time. I then partake of two break-cakes. By this practise, abba, shall I gain everlasting life or am I mistaken?" Another brother asked, "I engage in handiwork each day. My manual labor allows me to keep myself and give a few obols to the poor. By this practise, shall I be redeemed or am I mistaken?" Other brethren also put forth their inquiries of the same nature as the first two, but Abba Pambo never parted with a word. After a four-day visit and the abba still maintained silence, the brethren wished to depart. The clergy intervened and said to them, "Be not troubled, brothers. God will recompense you." A priest then attempted to explain Pambo's conduct, saying, "It is not the custom of the elder to give a word immediately. For he will not utter a word until God enlightens him." The visiting brothers, thereupon, went again to the elder. They besought him with these words, "Pray for us, abba." Pambo then asked, "Are you leaving?" They answered deferentially, "Yea, abba." Pambo then positioned himself so as to write on the ground. He then gave an inspired answer to their former queries in the following form: "Pambo," he asked himself aloud, "if thou wert to fast two days and then partake of two bread-cakes, wouldest thou become a monk by such a diet? Nay." The elder then paused, after which he took up the second seeker's activities. The abba asked himself aloud, "Pambo, if thou wert to work for thy livelihood daily, and also remember the poor by giving alms, wouldest thou become a monk by such work? Nay." He then gazed upon those two visiting brothers and said, "Your activities are good. If you guard and keep your conscience with your goodly virtues, you shall live." The brothers were comforted by his assessment, for which they departed rejoicing.²⁷

²⁶ "Of Obedience," ¶ 247, *Paradise*, II:55, 56; "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 3, loc. cit.

²⁷ "Of Watchfulness," ¶ 376, *Paradise*, II:84; "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 2, loc. cit.

Two Egyptian brothers according to the flesh, named Paisios and Esaias, became men of means and property upon the repose of their parents. The money received from the sale of the estate, after everything was sold, was divided evenly between the brothers. The one brother distributed every bit of it to the poor and became a monk. He took up the labors of an anchorite in the desert. Together with mortifying his flesh, he was toiling toward his salvation by purifying his soul. His brother also took up the Schema of the monastics. He, however, neither gave his portion away nor secluded himself in the desert. Near the town, he built a small monastery. He also added a clinic and refectory for those in need. He chose to give himself completely to the service of his neighbor.

At length, both brothers reposed. The monks who knew the background history of the brothers actually had a dispute regarding which one of the brothers had fulfilled the law of Christ. Since no solution proved satisfactory, the matter was laid before Abba Pambo. He affirmed, "Both brothers are perfect before our Lord. The one was like Patriarch Abraham and the other was like Prophet Elias." The fathers asked him to explain. The abba remarked, "The one brother was hospitable like Abraham. The other brother was a hermit like Elias. Both modes of conduct were equally pleasing to our Savior." The fathers, nevertheless, were dissatisfied with this response. Abba Pambo then laid the matter before the Judge and Lawgiver Himself, Jesus Christ. He entreated the Lord to reveal the truth of the matter. After several days of supplicating God, Abba Pambo received a vision. He saw both Paisios and Elias in Paradise. He disclosed his vision to the fathers, saying, "As God is my Witness, I beheld both brothers in Paradise." The abba's word was believed and the dispute was settled. The asceticism of the one brother and the deeds of mercy of the other brother were pleasing to Christ, since they both performed their work for the sake of Christ.²⁸

At another time, Abba Theodore of Pherme came visiting and bade Abba Pambo: "Give me a word, abba." It was only after much exertion did Pambo answer, "Begone, O Theodore! Let thy mercy be poured out on every man. For loving-kindness possesses freedom of speech before God."²⁹

Blessed Abba Pior came to Abba Pambo's cell. Pior took along some bread for the visit. Pambo observed that the guest brought his own food and asked, "Why, father, hast thou done this?" Abba Pior answered, "Please do not let what I have done be grievous to thee. No discourtesy was meant." Pambo gave no answer. He held his tongue and bid him adieu. After the

²⁸ *The Prologue from Ochrid*, by Bishop Nikolai Velimirović, s.v. "July 18th."

²⁹ "Of Love, Charity, and Hospitality," ¶ 418, *Paradise*, II:97; "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 14, p. 166.

passage of some time, Pambo went to the cell of Pior. He took along some bread that had been dipped in water. When Pior beheld the soaked bread, he asked Pambo, "Why hast thou done this, father?" Pambo answered, "No discourtesy was intended. Please do not let this grieve thee that I have also dipped the bread in water."³⁰

The Value of Sobriety

It was said that Abba Pambo was never seen to smile or laugh. One



Saint Pambo

day the devils wished to provoke him to laughter. What did they contrive? They suspended a feather on a piece of wood. With rapid movements, as they disported and danced, they carried it about hither and thither. With much uproar, they kept shouting, "Go, go!" Pambo seeing such a ridiculous display, chuckled. At that moment, the devils ran about, jumping in malignant glee and exclaiming, "Ha! ha! Abba Pambo has given way to laughter!" The abba responded, "I did not chuckle to myself but at your infirmity, for I saw how weak you

are insofar that it took so many of you to carry one little feather!"³¹

Our saint was once assailed by the demon of blasphemy. Abba Pambo begged God to deliver him. The abba then heard a voice from on high, saying, "Pambo, Pambo, despond not because of the iniquity of others, but be mindful only of thine own deeds. Let the blasphemies of the devil be on his own head." Therefore, despise blasphemous thoughts; for they are satanic and alien to us; and by this method we shall hold them in contempt, once and for all, by the grace of God.³²

The Value of the Work of the Monk

There was a time when Abba Pambo was visiting some of the districts in the land of Egypt. He had as his companions brother monks. As they traversed through various places, on one occasion he saw some secular people sitting down and taking their ease. He addressed them and said, "Rise up and

³⁰ "Palladius: Blessed Pambo," *Paradise*, I:104.

³¹ "Of Watchfulness," ¶ 325, *Paradise*, II:74; "Pi," *The Sayings*, ¶ 13, loc. cit.

³² Quoted from the *Evergetinos* [Bk. III, Hypothesis 30] in *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek).

be blessed by greeting the monks; for their lips are holy, as they are ever in converse with the Lord.”³³

At another time, some of the brethren came and asked Abba Pambo to give his opinion on what they said was a hypothetical case: “There are three monks in one place. One lives in silence. The second, who is infirm, gives thanks to God for his infirmity. The third ministers and relieves others. Is it thine opinion that all three monks serve God equally?” Abba Pambo responded: “If a man should dwell in silence, for the sake of God and not out of vainglory or some human reason, it is well. If a man should give thanks for his infirmities, he becomes like one who dwells in silence. If a man should minister with long-suffering to the needs of others, and if he should exercise constraint in all matters, and if he should perform his ministrations not only with love and gladness but also according to the will of those who are being ministered to by him, he becomes like one who sits still in silence and like one who suffers ill. In this way, then, does the work of all three monks have equal merit.”³⁴

The brethren came on another occasion to Abba Pambo and posed the following situation: “Supposing that a man living in the world, having both wife and children, should give alms, free his slaves, redeem captives, visit the sick, relieve the afflicted, and do all that is required of him. Dost thou consider such a man equal in labor to one of the three classes of monastics, that is to say, the monk living in silence, the monk suffering infirmity, and the monk ministering to those in need?” Abba Pambo answered, “No, fathers, not altogether.” The visitors asked, “Please explain.”

Elder Pambo replied, “Undoubtedly the life led by this man living in the world is a life of righteousness. Nevertheless, his conduct is outside the body. The life led by the monk is the interior life. The work of the monk is labor inside the body, that is, abstaining, praying, keeping vigil, enduring hunger and thirst, and undergoing other austerities. He ought to constrain his will at every moment. His warfare is constant, whether it be secret or open. It is well known and evident to men that the virtuous living in the world, despite their exemplary conduct, are not equal to the monastics in their labors. Our Lord Jesus Christ surnamed the monks ‘sons of light.’³⁵ Those who live in the world are ‘sons of the world.’ Now the monk ought to serve God with all his members, thoughts, and activities. He ought to serve God perfectly with stern labors and afflictions. He is to present his body a living sacrifice,

³³ “Of the Greatness of the Solitary Life,” ¶ 634, *Paradise*, II:148.

³⁴ “Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule,” ¶ 606, *Paradise*, II:284.

³⁵ Lk. 16:8; Jn. 12:36; 1 Thess. 5:5.

holy, and well-pleasing to God.³⁶ He is to offer himself with rational and spiritual service, since through Christ not only has the world been crucified to him but also he to the world.³⁷ Our Savior speaks of this, uttering: 'If anyone is willing to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and keep on following Me [Mt. 16:24; Lk. 9:23].' In other words, our Lord is saying, 'Let not the one who would follow Me fulfill his own will. Let such a one solely perform My will. Let him bear tribulations and afflictions. The monk that shall leave houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, wife, children, lands, on account of His name, shall receive a hundredfold, and shall inherit life everlasting.'³⁸ As to those men living in the world, our Savior said, "'Make for yourselves friends out of the mammon of unrighteousness, that, whenever ye fail, they might receive you into the everlasting tabernacles [Lk. 16:9].'" For as men who are in the world receive monks into their houses, so shall the monks receive those who have lived in the world into the kingdom of the heavens. Our Lord showed that all the good things of God and His kingdom belong to the monastics who, from their youth even to their old age, labored for God. But it is appropriate here that we should speak to what degree the soul is superior to the body. The conduct of life taken up by monks is that of silent contemplation and the works thereof. These endeavors excel those of righteous men living in the world. To what degree? It is as much superior as the conduct of angels is to the life of men who are in the world. So is the conduct of life of the monastic more superior to that of men in the world. Why? Men who are in the world please God because of their love for men. Monastics please God because of their love for God."

The abba's guests then asked, "Into how many orders have the holy fathers arranged the monastic conduct of life?" Abba Pambo answered, "There are three orders." The brethren continued, "What are those three orders, abba?" The elder replied, "Hearken to the words of our Lord as recorded in the Gospel parable: "'Behold, the one who soweth went out to sow. And as he was sowing, some seeds indeed fell by the wayside, and the birds came and devoured them. And other seed fell upon the rocky places, where it had not much earth; and straightway it sprang up, because it had no depth of earth. But after the sun rose, it was scorched; and because it had no root, it was dried up. And other seed fell upon the thorns; and the thorns shot up, and choked them [Mt. 13:3-7].'" Now these three types of seed are those who are living in the world.

³⁶ Rom. 12:1.

³⁷ Gal. 6:14.

³⁸ Mt. 19:29.

“With regard to the other seed of which Christ spoke, He said: ‘But other seed fell upon the good ground, and it kept on yielding fruit: some indeed a hundredfold, but some sixty, and some thirty [Mt. 13:8].’ These are the grades of monks. Now the seed that yielded thirtyfold is that of the beginners. The seed that yielded sixtyfold is that of the half-perfect. The seed that yielded a hundredfold is that of the perfect.”

But one of the visiting fathers persisted and asked Abba Pambo, “Let us say that there is a man living in the world, who is conducting himself perfectly and rightly. Is his labor equal at least to the beginner’s grade of monk?” Pambo answered, “Nay.” Then the visiting fathers asked with one voice, “Why not?” The abba explained: “Although the beginner monk is small, still he is more excellent than the man in the world who keeps every commandment.” Pambo then brought up the example of the great Anthony and his disciple Paul. He said, “Anthony told Paul to dwell in silence that he may receive temptations from the devils. He said this because the perfection of the monk arises from spiritual conduct. Spiritual conduct is acquired by the conduct of the heart. Purity of heart arises from the conduct of the mind. The conduct of the mind is prayer which is unceasing and contending with devils, whether in thought or in visions. These endeavors have no opportunity for existence without silence and solitariness.”³⁹

The Value of the Love of Poverty

Pambo was not held in thrall to lucre. This was amply shown upon the visit of the blessed woman Melanie (the Elder). She was of Spanish descent but grew up in Rome. She had been a widow from the age of twenty-two. She went to Mount Nitria that she might make a pilgrimage and see the fathers. This included our Pambo, as well as Arsenios, Serapion the Great, Paphnutios of Sketis, Isidore the confessor and Bishop of Hermopolis, and Dioskoros. She had sold all her property and converted it into gold, which she used for charitable ends. Melanie arrived in Alexandria. The blessed Isidore Xenodochos related to her the life and deeds of Abba Pambo. She, thereupon, was resolved to visit the abba and make a handsome donation. She hired guides and took a basket which was filled with silver coins, about three hundred pounds in weight. When she came into his presence, he was occupied at his handiwork. He was sitting and plaiting the leaves of palm trees. He gave her his blessing, and said, “May God give thee thy reward!” Abba Pambo then directed the steward, named Origen, to dispense the money among all the brethren who are in the island in Libya. Pambo had them in mind since they were extremely poor. He gave express orders to Origen not to distribute the

³⁹ “Questions and Answers on the Ascetic Rule,” ¶¶ 607-613, *Paradise*, II:285-287.

donation among any who dwelt in Egypt; for he said, "We, thank God, have abundant means here to keep ourselves."

Melanie later recounted the interview. She admitted that she thought within herself, "As I stood before him, I really expected to be treated with honor or at least to be praised for the munificence of the donation. But he said nothing. So I said to him, 'Milord, dost thou wish to know the amount within the basket? It is three hundred pounds of silver.'" The abba continued to keep his eyes fixed on his handiwork. He then spoke to her without directing his gaze toward her and said, "My daughter, the Lord to Whom thou hast offered thy money does not require an accounting of the weight. For He Who weighed the mountains in a balance knows how much silver is inside that basket. If the money were for me, thou wouldest have done well to give me a tally of the weight. But since thou hast consigned the money to God, Who did not despise the widow's two mites,⁴⁰ there is no need to mention the amount to Him. It is better to be silent about it." Melanie, therefore, was very much edified. The year was 393.⁴¹

Prophecies of Abba Pambo to a Disciple

Palladios affirms that Pambo possessed the power to utter words of prophecy. "I shall tell thee this, my child," Pambo said to his disciple, "that the days will come when additions and omissions will be made, altering the books of the evangelists, prophets, and holy fathers. They will smooth over and lenify the holy Scriptures. They will compose hymns and writings according to their own science of form and structure. Their minds will be muddled among them, and they will become alienated from the heavenly Prototype. For this reason the holy fathers had previously encouraged the monks of the desert to write down the lives of the fathers not on parchment, which can be washed or scraped clean, but on papyrus, because the coming generation will change them to suit their own personal tastes. So thou shalt see, the evil that comes will be horrible."

Then the disciple asked: "What sayest thou, O abba, that the traditions and practises among the Christians will be altered? Perhaps there will be a dearth of priests in the Church when these unfortunate times come?" Pambo continued: "In those times the love for God in most souls will grow cold and a great sadness will fall upon the world. One nation shall face off against another. Peoples will move away from their own places. Rulers will be confused. The clergy will be thrown into anarchy, and the monks will be inclined more to negligence. Church leaders will consider useless anything concerned with the salvation of souls, as much for their own souls as for the

⁴⁰ Lk. 21:1-4.

⁴¹ "Palladius: Blessed Pambo," *Paradise*, I:103.

souls of their flocks; indeed, they will despise any such concern. All will show eagerness and energy for every matter regarding their dining table and their appetites. They will be lazy in their prayers and casual in their criticisms. As for the lives and teachings of the holy fathers, they will not have any interest to hear them, much less to emulate them. But rather they will complain and say that ‘if we had lived in those times, then we would have conducted ourselves similarly.’ And the bishops shall give way to the powerful of the world, giving answers on different matters only after taking gifts from everywhere and consulting the rational logic of the academics. The poor man’s rights will not be defended. They will afflict widows. They will harass orphans. Debauchery will permeate these people. Most will not believe in God. They will hate each other and devour one another like beasts. The one will steal from the other. They will be drunk and will walk about as ones blind.” The disciple again asked: “What shall we do in such a state?” And Elder Pambo answered, “My child, in these times whoever will save his soul and prompt others to be saved will be called great in the kingdom of the heavens.”⁴²

Repose

Palladios, Bishop of Helenopolis of Bithynia, in his *Lausiac History*, records: “Our Lord had so dispensed that on the very day in which I entered the mountain, that the blessed Pambo would be called home by the Lord. He had neither fever nor illness. In fact, he reposed in the midst of sewing together palms leaves for mats.⁴³ The man of God was seventy years old. As he was coming to the end of the mat upon which he was laboring, he called me. When he put the finishing touches on the mat, he said to me, ‘Take this mat from me. May it be a reminder to thee of me, for I have nought to leave thee!’ The moment that he relinquished it into my hands, he immediately fell asleep in the Lord. I wrapped his precious body in linen cloths and buried him. I then left the desert. I shall treasure that mat as a sacred relic to the end of my life.”⁴⁴

When Abba Pambo reposed, there were other men of renown standing by. There was the priest and steward Origen, Ammonios, and other brethren. They were full of memories of the old man. They quoted him, for he said, “I know not that I have ever eaten the bread of idleness. For I have only eaten what came from the labor of my own hands.” Origen and Ammonios, slaves of Christ, spoke of the elder’s life. They bore witness concerning Abba

⁴² “Prophecies by Abba Pambo,” *Orthodox Christian Witness*, Vol. XL, No. 7 (562) (July 2006): 16-18.

⁴³ *The Great Synaxaristes* (in Greek) records he was plaiting a basket.

⁴⁴ “Palladius: Blessed Pambo,” *Paradise*, I:103, 104.

behalf. A miraculous sign confirmed his settlement on that spot. Upon planting his staff—a dry and desiccated stick of wood—he invoked the name of the Holy Trinity. Behold the wonder! The staff took root and grew into a great tree. To the day of this recording, that same tree produced wonderfully ripe fruit. It was the bloom of God's grace induced the blossoming of Dios' rod. In this manner, also, was it made manifest the fruitfulness of Dios' redolent soul. Now despite his removal from society, it was not possible to conceal such a radiant treasure as this holy father. The natives in the surrounding parts soon came to learn of his presence and exploits. At first they came to this luminary of piety seeking spiritual guidance and comfort. Father Dios, through his labors by which he attracted divine grace, healed both bodily and spiritual infirmities. He urged the petitioners to attribute the cures to the grace supplied by the Holy Spirit. If anyone offered him a donation, whether in coinage or edibles, he would immediately distribute it among the poor, the destitute, and the infirm.

Now the fame of this venerable elder also came into the ears of Emperor Theodosios II (408-450), son of Emperor Arkadios and the grandson of Theodosios I. The sovereign visited Dios, for it was not possible that such profound virtue and power could remain entirely obscure in the countryside. The emperor took in his party the Patriarch of Constantinople, that is, Attikos (406-425). Theodosios so marvelled at the ascetic's excellence that he wished to build a monastery at the site. He pledged funds for its construction. After some coercion, Attikos ordained Monk Dios to the priesthood. He also made him abbot of the new monastery. The patriarch perceived that Dios, as Aaron of old, had the priesthood bestowed upon him at the blossoming of his rod.⁴ The emperor, meanwhile, kept his word. The new monastery, a sacred school for souls, was established. Not much time passed before many brethren collected around Father Dios like bees around a honey pot. He, thereupon, became the spiritual father to both hermits and coenobites whom he guided aright.

The ever-memorable one performed many miracles by the power and the invocation of Christ. It was soon realized that the monastery required a well close by. The fathers began digging for a long time, but had no success in finding water. Harken now to an example that emulated Moses of old.⁵ Dios called upon the name of Christ, entreating the Lord to bring forth water that was pent up in the entrails of the earth. The holy hegumen supplicated the Lord to pity His servants who were made to fetch water only from afar. He asked the Lord's beneficence to provide a spring of pure water that would fill

⁴ Num. 17:5.

⁵ Ex. 17:6, Num. 20:8.

up the well. God hearkened to his prayer with an abundance of crystal clear water. At another time, through Dios' intercession, the hegumen raised up a drowned man. Hence, as Elias of old, he resurrected the dead to life through his ardent prayer.⁶ The Lord worked many other miracles through His saint.

Father Dios arrived at an advanced age and succumbed to a grave illness. When the righteous one was about to repose, he partook of the immaculate Mysteries and then took to his bed. He lay there very still and without respiration. About him there stood, weeping and lamenting, those who were with him in the end. All the funeral arrangements were properly readied. Patriarch Attikos and Patriarch Alexander of Antioch were among the mourners. Suddenly, in the midst of the burial, the deceased arose. Lo, the miracle! The venerable Dios rose up from the bier as from sleep. He made an unexpected announcement: the Lord added to him another fifteen years of life.⁷ These tidings ushered in no small joy and wonder among the brethren.

How did he conduct himself in those final fifteen years? He allotted the time in service to others. He guided and counseled those seeking spiritual direction. He aided the indigent and homeless. He wrought cures among the sick and weak. Slightly before the fifteen years were to expire there appeared a man, brilliant like the sun, clad in priestly vestments in the church altar of the monastery. He disclosed to Father Dios that the end of his earthly sojourn was at hand. Father Dios gave sincere thanks, after which he commended his soul quietly and serenely to the Lord. The venerable Abbot Dios was then interred in his monastery. With joy, he passed from this life to the Light that has no evening, taking up his abode with the spirits of the righteous. He, nevertheless, also prays for his flock and those who call upon him in faith.

**On the 19th of July, the holy Church commemorates
our venerable Mother MAKRINA,
the sister of Saint Basil.⁸**

Makrina, our most holy mother, was the eldest sister of Saint Basil the Great (ca. 330-379), Saint Gregory of Nyssa (ca. 335-ca. 395), and Saint Peter of Sebasteia (d. 395).

⁶ 3 Kgs. (1 Kgs.) 17:21, 22. July 19th, Vespers Sticheron, Mode Four.

⁷ Cf. 4 Kgs. (2 Kgs.) 20:6.

⁸ The Life of Saint Makrina was written in Greek by her devoted younger brother, the holy Hierarch Gregory of Nyssa. The text was also rendered in simpler Greek by Nikodemos the Hagiorite, which he included in the *Neon Eklogion*. A divine office with a second canon was composed by the hymnographer, Father Gerasimos Mikrayiananites.