

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. The old man was surveying the road when he saw Satan drawing near in the likeness of a man and he passed by his dwelling. He seemed to be wearing some kind of cotton garment, full of holes, and a small flask hung at each hole. The old man said to him, 'Where are you off to?'

He said, 'I am going to stir up the memories of the brethren.'

The old man said, 'And what is the purpose of these small flasks?'

He replied, 'I am taking food for the brethren to taste.'

The old man said, 'All those kinds?'

He replied, 'Yes, for if a brother does not like one sort of food, I offer him another, and if he does not like the second any better, I offer him a third; and of all these varieties he will like one at least.'

With these words he departed. The old man remained watching the road until he saw him coming back again. When the old man saw him, he said to him, 'Good health to you.'

The other replied, 'How can I be in good health?'

The old man asked him what he meant, and he replied, 'Because they all opposed me, and no one received me.'

The old man said, 'Ah, you did not find any friends down there?'

He replied, 'Yes, I have a monk who is a friend down there. He, at least, obeys me and when he sees me he changes like the wind.'

The old man asked him the monk's name.

'Theopemptus,' he replied. With these words he went away.

Then Abba Macarius got up and went to the desert below his own. When they heard of it the brothers took branches of palm to go to meet him. Each one got ready, thinking that it was to him the old man was coming down. But he enquired which was the one on the mountain called Theopemptus, and when he had found out he went to his cell. Theopemptus received him with joy. When he was alone with him the old man asked him, 'How are you getting on?'

Theopemptus replied, "Thanks to your prayers, all goes well."

The old man asked, 'Do not your thoughts war against you?'

He replied, 'Up to now, it is all right,' for he was afraid to admit anything.

The old man said to him, 'See how many years I have lived as an ascetic, and am praised by all, and though I am old, the spirit of fornication troubles me.'

Theopemptus said, 'Believe me, Abba, it is the same with me.'

The old man went on admitting that other thoughts still warred against him, until he had brought him to admit them about himself. Then he said, 'How do you fast?'

He replied, 'Till the ninth hour.'

'Practise fasting a little later; meditate on the Gospel and the other Scriptures, and if an alien thought arises within you, never look at it but always look upwards, and the Lord will come at once to your help.'

When he had given the brother this rule, the old man then returned to his solitude. He was watching the road once more when he saw the devil, to whom he said, 'Where are you going this time?'

He replied, 'To arouse the memories of the brethren,' and he went away. When he came back the Saint asked him, 'How are the brethren?'

He replied that it had gone badly. The old man asked him why. He replied, 'They are all obdurate, and the worst is the one friend I had who used to obey me. I do not know what has changed him, but not only does he not obey me any more, but he has become the most obdurate of them all. So I have promised myself not to go down there again, at least not for a long time from now.'

When he had said this, he went away leaving the old man, and the Saint returned to his cell.

The Desert Christian, Benedicta Ward,
Macmillan Publishing, pp. 126-7

OFTEN I HAVE HEARD THE EVIL SPIRITS speaking of their wiles against men in this manner. One would say, 'I am assigned to a hard man. When I suggest an evil thought to him, he immediately stands to pray, and I go out ablaze.' And another demon says, "Mine is easy. He listens to me and does what I suggest to him; and I love him very much." Therefore watch yourselves always, and sign yourselves [*with the Cross*] in the Name of Christ.

Saint Pachomius the Great, *Pachomian Koinonia*,
Cistercian Publications Inc., Vol. I., p. 347

PEARLS FROM THE HOLY FATHERS

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