

THERE WAS A CERTAIN YOUTH whose name was Macarius, and when he became a young man about eighteen years old, he used to pasture flocks and herds, along with [other] young men of his own age and position, by the side of the lake which is called Mareotis, and without wishing to do so he unwittingly committed a murder; and without saying a word to any man he straightway rose up and departed, and he went out and journeyed into the desert. Thus he attained to the fear of God, and to the love of men, in such wise that he esteemed himself lightly; and he passed three years in the desert, in the open air, and without a roof [over his head]. Now in that country no rain falleth, and this every one, so to say, knoweth, either from hearsay or from experience. And after three years he built himself a cell, and he dwelt therein for five and twenty years [and performed] great labours; and he was held worthy of the divine gift of being able to treat with contempt the devils, and he was completely happy in the ascetic life and in the noble labours thereof. Now I [Palladius] dwelt hard by this man for no short time, and once I asked him, “What is thy thought about the sinfulness of that murder [which thou didst commit]?” And he said unto me, “I am entirely untroubled by it, for I am bound to confess that the sin of [this] involuntary murder was the good cause of the redemption of my life, and the testimony of the Scripture confirmeth this view, saying not even Moses, the servant of the Lord, would have been held worthy of the divine unless, through fear for the murder which he had committed, he had forsaken Egypt, and come unto Mount Sinai, where he was held to be worthy of converse with God, and to compose the commandments of the spirit.”

Now we speak these things, not because we wish to help murder, but only in order that we may particularly show that spiritual excellences spring from tribulations,

when a man is not of his own will persuaded to draw nigh unto goodness. Some spiritual excellences arise from free will, and some from tribulation; and in the works which I have found appended to this history I have discovered that the murder which Macarius committed belonged to this latter class. And Macarius prayed always, and he prayed with his arms and hands extended in the form of a cross. And when he had drawn nigh to the end of his course, which was not caused by illness, at that time he stood up in the corner of his cell, and extended his hands and arms in prayer, and thus praying he yielded up his spirit. And when he who used to bring him food came and saw him standing by the side of the wall with his hands stretched out, he remained standing outside thinking that Macarius was standing up in prayer, as was his wont. Then, having waited for about three hours, he opened the door and went in, and he said unto him, “Bless, master!” And when he did not answer him he drew nigh and shook him; and when he saw that he was dead he came to us and told us, and having come we saw him standing in the form of a cross, and we marvelled. Now when we had laid him out upon the ground we were unable to bring his hands nigh unto his body, and so we dug his grave in the form of a cross and laid him in it. And I was sorely grieved because of his departure, and I fell into a slumber and slept, and a voice came unto me, which said, “Inasmuch as during his lifetime he loved the cross, which he bore through his good works, in it also he shall have his rest; in the form of that which he desired longingly hath he been buried, and in the same form shall he stand up at the right hand on the day of Christ.” And having heard these things I awoke, and I glorified God and the power of the Cross.

Paradise of the Holy Fathers,
tr. Budge, Vol. I, pp. 109–11

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