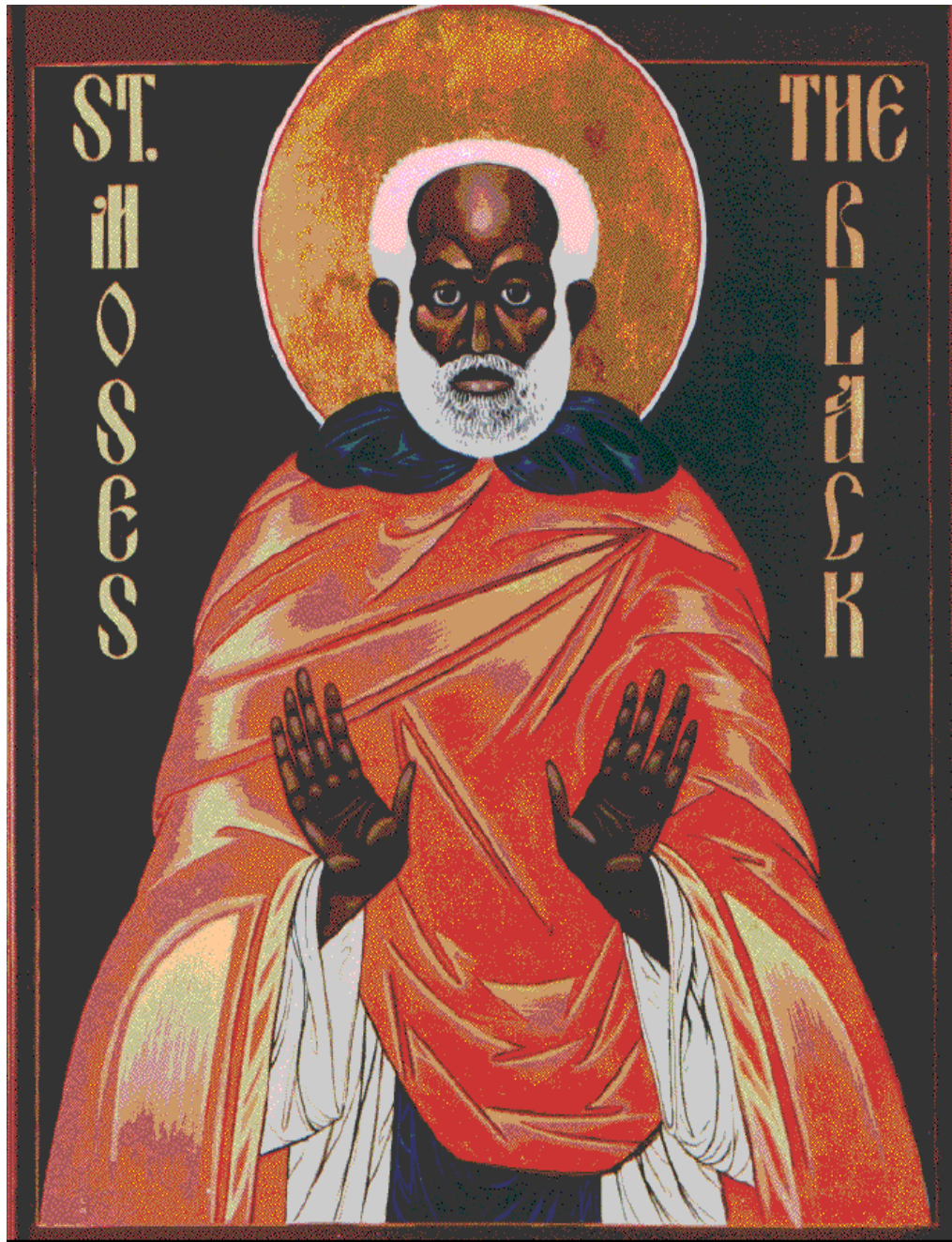


**The Remembrance (Martyrdom) of
“Anba Moussa Al-Assouad”
St. Moses the Black
24th of Baonah, July First**



**Willim a. Hanna; Ph.D.
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The Story of St. Moses the Ethiopian (Black) “Anba Moussa Al-Assouad” is a story of unusual repentance which can be a great source of hope and inspiration for the worst sinner there is. Born in the beginning of the fourth century, a contemporary of Abba Maquaar the Great, and Abba Isethorous the priest of shehit.

He was an Abyssinian (Nubian). Nubia is a region south of Egypt and north of Sudan which was a great kingdom known even during the pharonic time. Ramses II (1500 B.C.) built two temples in Nubia, known as the temples of Abu Sembel, one for himself and the other for his favorite wife, Nefertari. Through religious worship, he was able to control the region. Nubia also became a Christian Kingdom at one point in time and is credited for attempting to stop the Islamic invasion of Egypt. Part of Nubia is now integrated with Egypt, and the other with Sudan.

Moses was a vicious slave who was a robber, fornicator, and savage killer. When he drank, seven large wine flasks were not enough for him with one meal. One time before his repentance, he crossed the river with a sword between his teeth to kill a shepherd attending a flock of sheep for no reason other than to kill.

He was an idol worshipper who inspite of all his faults, was searching for the true God. He used to speak to the sun saying : "if your are the true god, reveal yourself to me!"

He was sent away by his master because of his viciousness toward others, free and slaves alike. In his sin, he boasted about being a slave who freed himself by force. He then led a gang of 70 thieves.

One day, he heard a voice saying: "If you want to know the true God, go to the prairie of shehit (the wilderness of the scale of the hearts)." He went there and came in contact with Abba Isethorous, the priest of the prairie of Shehit. Abba Isethorous was frightened seeing this huge man carrying a sword and dressed like a gangster. Moses told him that he was not going to cause any harm and he was searching for the true God.

Abba Isethorous took him in and started to explain to him about the true God. He was very receptive, and showed great repentance and open heart. He was introduced to St. Makarios the Great (Abba Maquaar Al-Kabeer, follower of St. Anthony the Father of Monks). Anba Maquaar was to baptize him, and as Moussa Al-Assouad started to confess his sins, Abba Maquaar, saw a tablet that was all black, but with every sin confessed a part became whiter until

¹ * Information for this article from hand written notes by the departed Anba Andraous, the departed bishop of Domyat, Belquas, and Prairie (1930-1972). He was given the name Moussa in his ordination as monk in Al-Syrian monastery in 1954. Anba Moussa Al-Assouad was his patron saint. These notes were

it became all white as snow. Abba Maquaar prophesied about him saying: "He will be great in the monks and will receive the crown of martyrdom"

After testing him for years, Anba Maquaar put on him the eskeem (habit of monks) and he was elevated from novus to monk.

To show true repentance, he channeled all his physical strength to do good without asking for any reward. He used to serve the old and the sick of the monks bringing water for them in the dark of the night from far away and cleaning their Qulally (places of living for monks).

One time the devil tempted him with unbearable sexual desires, he ran to the priest (Fr. Isethorous) to help him refusing to go back to his cave. Abba Isethorous calmed him, prayed with him, and took him back to the cave. He asked him to climb to the top and look West and East and then asked him what do you see. Moses replied: "to the west I see a multitude of vicious devils ready to attack, but when I look East I see a multitude of angels." Abba Isethorous explained: "The devils are enraged by your good example, but the angels are always here to help you and protect you." This gave him peace and he returned to his place.

After many years in the life of ascetics, Pope Theophilous (23rd Pope) saw it fit to ordain him a priest. To test him, the Pope exclaimed: "Who is this Ethiopian (black) and what is he doing here in the Church!" St. Moses upon hearing the words left the Church quietly speaking to himself: "Moses, you do not deserve to be here" The pope sent for him and completed the ordination. After the service the pope spoke to him in front of the congregation of monks saying: "Moses, today you are all white." Anba Moussa asked the pope: "My father is it on the outside (because he was wearing the white cloth of liturgical service) or on the inside." The pope replied: "All of you, inside out"

He advanced in the life of celibacy until he became a leader of more than 500 brothers. One time a man came to see St. Moses, and not knowing who he was, he started cursing this black to whom he was introduced. St. Moses kept his calm and did not show any emotion good or bad. Afterwards the disciples asked him if he was insulted or enraged, he replied neither. They asked if he was afraid, he replied: "I was afraid for him to loose control and hurt me, fearing for him not me, because I used to get enraged."

One time a man came to see St. Arsanious, the teacher of the kings' children. Anba Arsanious asked that the man be given food to eat and did not say a single word to the man (this was a lesson in silence the man did not understand!). He left unsatisfied, so he asked to see another father of monks, so they brought him to see St. Moses the Black. Anba Moussa talked to the man and joked with him and sent him in peace. The man was extremely pleased with this encounter. The elder who brought him in was extremely puzzled, and after many prayers the piety of both men was revealed to him in a dream, in which he saw two ships sailing in peace, one carrying Anba Arsanious and the spirit of God was with him, and the other carrying Anba Moussa and the angels of God feeding him honey!

He lived in a cave most of his life as a monk, worshipping God, and serving others. For a time he lived in the inner desert more than three days walk. Once many brothers came to visit him in the inner desert. He started to cook a meal of lentils for them and ran out of water. He kept going in and out of the place until a heavy rain fell and filled all the water storage pots in the place. The brothers asked him, Abba Moussa, why were you going in and out. He replied: "I was arguing with God about our need and he sent rain out of season and supplied us with the water we needed for our meal. He satisfies all our needs."

One time he was with his disciple Zakariah at the water well, and he started to serve his disciple. When Zakariah refused to accept the service of his spiritual father, he took Zakariah head dress and stepped on it with his feet and placed it on his own head saying: "my son, a father has to show humility even to his own spiritual children." At Zakariah's death, Abba Moussa was present and he was comforting his disciple saying: "I see the angels of heaven coming to carry your soul, my son Zakariah."

In his old age he had an illness, many soars in his legs that prevented him from walking. He was forced to live in the place of Abba Isethorous for a year because he could not move. Abba Moussa was sad because illness prevented him from serving others. When he learned that the illness was from the devil, he forced himself to walk to serve others until he became like a dried and burned reed.

When he became old, once he was sitting with Abba Maquaar and heard Abba Maquaar prophecy saying: "very soon seven will receive the crown of martyrdom." St. Moses replied that he is one of the seven reasoning that because he killed by the sword, he will be killed by the sword. Not long after, the barbarians attacked the monastery, which is now St. Bishoy's. St. Moses offered himself to them without any resistance. An old monk, saw the angels putting crowns of martyrdom on six heads, realizing that he was trying to hide away, he came out of hiding to receive the seventh crown of martyrdom.

He lived as a monk in a cave known to this day as St. Moses the Black cave. This is near the monastery of Baramous, named after the Byzantine brothers and saints, Maximus and Domadeous. Also, some say that he commuted to the monastery of St. Bishoy (The two monasteries are 7 Km apart). Historians mention a monastery named after St. Moses the Black, this monastery was not established until sometime in the 9th century.

His martyrdom was at the monastery of Anba Bishoy but his holy remains were later moved to the Baramous monastery where they are to this day. Some of the remains are in other places as a blessing given by the monastery to important places of worship under strict rules from the highest authorities of the Church.

St. Moses the Black is a great example of repentance, obedience, humility, leadership by good example, life of prayer, and service to those less able and those in need. The Church celebrates St. Moses the Black on the 24th of Baonah which is the First of July. May his blessings be with us always. Glory be to God forever. Amen.
published by St. Mary Church, Fagalla, Cairo, Egypt, as a book in Arabic in 1984.

About St. Moses the Black They Said:

- ❖ One time St. Moses the Ethiopian (the Black) was cursed by evil men. One of the brothers asked him: Did your heart faint (experience fear or anger) when you were cursed? He answered no, I was only afraid, but did not respond with a single word. The brothers asked the elder what does that mean?
- ❖ The elder replied: The perfection of the monk consists of two parts: 1) The immunity of the physical senses, and 2) The immunity of the spiritual (inner) senses. St. Moses the Black achieved the one and at the time did not achieve the second. Controlling the physical senses is when the one who is cursed does not answer those who curse him. The control of the spiritual senses is when the one who is cursed does not experience anger in his heart.
- ❖ This is similar to what St. John the Short experienced one time when he was sitting with the brothers and a man came by and scolded him. St. John did not reply, and his countenance did not change (did not show signs of hurt, or anger). The brothers asked him and he replied: “I was not hurt or angry, by what was said, inside, and that is why I did not show any sign of anger on the outside.” This is a spiritual level St. Moses the Black did not yet achieve at that time in his spiritual life, he did not show anger on the outside but was struggling with anger of the heart on the inside.
- ❖ One time a brother asked St. Moses the Black many questions, Abba Moses replied: “Sit in your qualia (room), and your qualia will teach you everything!” The brothers were puzzled because other spiritual fathers were explaining many things to their disciples. The elder explained to the brothers that what Abba Moses did was best for this novus, because he needed first to sit in his qualia and learn as a beginner. And beginners need to learn to fast, and spend their nights awake in prayers, supplications, contemplation’s, and reading the holy books. After they are grounded in these basic things and have spent time in solitude, learn what is proper and what is not, they then can start to ask questions about more important things related to the life of monks.
- ❖ Some of the brothers asked Anba Bemoah, “You told us that there were three elders equal in stature: one spent his time in solitude, one in service to others, and one in illness with thanksgiving. How can it be?”
- ❖ Anba Bemoah replied: “If one spends his time in solitude praising God and not boasting about his abilities to control himself, it is good. And if one in his sickness is thankful to God, this is good also. But, one who spends his time in service to others with joy and without begrudging those whom he serves is exactly the same like the other two. The reward of all three is exactly the same.
- ❖ Anba Bemoah then continued: “There are men who spend a 100 years in their qualia and do not learn to control their thoughts and do not stop blaming others for their short falls, and there are others who spend very little time in good solitude, those are much better. We also have to know that to live the true life of solitude is better than serving others or

accepting illness with thanksgiving. The life of solitude is higher than the other virtues as the spirit is God is much higher than the spirits of the holy angels.

- ❖ Then one of the brothers asked: “Why do the devils fight us?” Anba Bemoah replied: “We are attacked by the evil in us by being willing to complete it’s purposes, but if you want to know about whom the devils really fought, those are Abba Moses and his companions.”
- ❖ One time a brother came to Abba Moses saying give me an advice, should I go to the harvest? Abba Moses replied: “Will you listen if I give You advice?” The man said yes. Abba Moussa told him to go to his qualia and learnt first to fast and pray. The man went to his qualia and prostrated himself three days and three nights weeping and praying. After that he spent fifty days praying and fasting eating only a daily ration of one peace of dried bread with salt When the devil tried to tempt this brother by the sin of pride, the brother put himself down to defeat the devil. And when the devil put him down to defeat him, the brother replied that the Lord have mercy on us although of our little deeds. Afterwards when Abba Moussa saw him doing the work of his hands, that is of the monks, he told him that he does not need to go
- ❖ to the harvest because he now knows the ways of the monks.

Sayings of St. Moses the Black "Anba Moussa AL-Assouad"

1. Sacrifice:

"It is good for one to give his own life to death, and especially for his neighbor, by that he is not condemned of anything!"

"It is good for one to die for every evil deed, and by that he does not cause anyone to be displeased before he departs from the flesh!"

"If one does not put himself in the position of sinner, God will not hear his prayer!" One brother asked him: "What is a sinning soul?" The elder (St. Moses) replied: "Everyone who cares about his own sin, and do not look at the sins of others!"

The elder (St. Moses) also said: "If the deeds do not match the prayer, the prayer is of no use!" The brother asked him: "how can the deeds be suitable for the prayers?" The elder (St. Moses) said: "One who prays for the forgiveness of his sins should thereon be alert because when one surrenders his will, God accepts him indeed!"

2. Caring for Our Own Salvation:

St. Moses wrote to Anba Pemen in reply to his request saying:

"I prefer your salvation in the fear of God above all things. Asking Him to make you complete in pleasing Him, so that your effort is not to waste, but acceptable to God with joy and gladness... Because we know that merchant is pleased when his business is successful. Also, one who learns a trade, is pleased when he becomes proficient in his trade, forgetting the effort, because he reached the proficiency he desired. Also, one who marries a woman who keeps her reputation has pleasure that fills his heart. And one who attains the honor of military service, will not fear death in the fight against the enemies of his king to please his master. Everyone of the mentioned is pleased to achieve his goal and puts the effort to reach it.

If it is so for the things of this world, how much more it is when the soul that chooses to serve God succeed in pleasing Him! Truly, I say to you that its pleasure is greater, because at the time of its departure, its good deeds meets her there and the angels are pleased when they see her coming free from the powers of the darkness. Because when the soul leaves the body is accompanied by the angels, it is then met by the powers of the enemy who try to hinder it because of what it owes them. The angels then have no business to try to defend it, but only its good deeds can defend it and protect it from its accusers. And when its victory is complete, the angels are pleased for that soul. They then praise God with it until it meets the Lord with gladness. At that moment it forgets all the sorrows of this world.

So, our way my dear friend is to put forth the maximum effort, in the short time we have on earth, to correct and purify our deeds from all evil hoping to gain salvation by the grace of God from the hands of the devils who are anxious to meet us, especially if any of their works are in us. because they are evil and show no mercy. So, blessed is the soul that is free from them, it will be pleased and her pleasure is great.

3. Spiritual Strife and Keeping the Commandments:

For this reason, my dear friend, we have to strife with tears so that the Lord may in his kindness have mercy on us. because those who sow with tears reap with gladness. Let us possess the desire to be with God, because those who desire God protect themselves from the desire to commit adultery. And those who desire meekness protect themselves from the love of silver (money). Let us desire peace to protect ourselves from hatred. Let us possess patience and long suffering because it will protect us from pettiness of the soul. Let us possess pure love for everyone to protect us from envy and jealousy.

Let us be humble in every act and every deed. Let us tolerate being cursed and teased to rid ourselves of pride. Let us be kind to all our neighbors to avoid condemnation. Let us reject the glories of the world and its honors to avoid false pride. Let us use the tongue to glorify God and to protect ourselves from lying. Let us love the purity of the heart to be saved from corruption, because all of these things surround the soul and follow it when it leaves the flesh. So, if anyone is wise and works with wisdom, he should not give his deposit (surrender the ghost) without having the good deeds that will help him go through the difficulty. So, let us use great care as much as we can and the Lord will help our weaknesses. Because the door of forgiveness is always open to those who repent as long as we are in the flesh.

(to be continued ..)

William Hanna
St. Louis, Missouri



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