VENERABLE MACARIUS THE GREAT

1. VENERABLE MACARIUS THE GREAT

Macarius was an Egyptian and one of the younger contemporaries of Anthony the Great. His father was a priest. Out of obedience to his parents, Macarius married. However, his wife died shortly thereafter and he withdrew into the wilderness where he spent sixty years in labor and struggle, both internally and externally for the Kingdom of Heaven. When they asked him: "Why is he so thin when he eats and when he does not eat?" He responded: "From the fear of God." So much did he succeed in cleansing his mind of evil thoughts and his heart of evil desires that God bestowed upon him the abundant gift of miracle-working so that he even raised the dead from the graves. His humility amazed both men and demons. A demon once said to him: "There is only one thing in which I am unable to overpower you. It is not in fasting; for I do not eat anything. It is not in vigils; for I never sleep." "But, what is it?" asked Macarius. "Your humility" answered the demon. Macarius often spoke to Paphnutius, his disciple: "Do not judge anyone and you will be saved." Macarius lived to be ninety-seven years old. Nine days before his death, St. Anthony and St. Pachomius appeared to him from the other world and informed him that he would die within nine days, which happened. Also, before his death, Macarius had a vision in which a cherubim revealed to him the blessed heavenly world, commended his effort and his virtue and said to him that he was sent to take his soul into the Kingdom of Heaven. He died in the year 390 A.D.

2. VENERABLE MARCARIUS OF ALEXANDRIA

Macarius was born in Alexandria and, at first, was a fruit vendor. He was baptized at age forty and as soon as he was baptized, he immediately withdrew to lead a life of asceticism. At first, he, together with Macarius the Great, was a disciple of St. Anthony. After that, he became the abbot of the Monastery called the Cells, located between Nitria and Skete. He was somewhat younger than Macarius the Great and also lived longer. He lived to be more than a hundred years old. Tormented by demonic temptations, especially the temptation of vanity, he humbled himself by the most rigorous labors and ceaseless prayer, uplifting his mind constantly toward God. Once, a brother saw him fill a basket with sand, carry it uphill and empty it. Astonished, the brother asked him, "What are you doing?" Macarius answered, "I am tormenting my tormentor," i.e. the devil. He died in the year 393 A.D.

3. SAINT ARSENIUS, BISHOP OF CORFU

Arsenius augmented and structured the Rite of the Sacrament of Holy Unction [Anointing with Oil] to its present form. He died in the year 959 A.D. His relics repose in the cathedral church in Corfu.

4. SAINT MARK, ARCHBISHOP OF EPHEUS

Mark was famous for his courageous defense of Orthodoxy at the Council of Florence (1439 A.D.) in spite of the emperor and the pope. He died peacefully in the year 1452 A.D. On his death bed, Mark implored Gregory, his disciple, and later the glorious Patriarch Genadius, to be careful of the snares of the West and to defend Orthodoxy.

5. BLESSED THEODORE, "FOOL FOR CHRIST" FROM NOVGOROD

Prior to his death, Theodore ran up and down the streets shouting to everyone: "Farewell, I am traveling far away!" He died in the year 1392 A.D.

HYMN OF PRAISE

SAINT MACARIUS THE GREAT

In Egypt, in the desert
Great loved reigned
Among the simple monks,
As in the kingdom of the saints.
Saint Macarius was
as a cherubim among them.
In every good deed
An example to the monks was he.
Macarius became ill;
For him, a monk went out to seek strawberries,
He went forth, he found, and he brought them
To soothe his elder's pain.
To partake of them, Macarius did not want,
He said, "There is a brother more ill.
Bring it to him; this gift is
more needed to that brother."
The second ailing brother cried and,
To the gift-bearer, said: "Forgive me!
But my neighbor is more needy
Of this charity than I."
The gift-bearer, the gift he took away
And, to that neighbor, gave it,
This one gave it to a third,
And that one to a fourth; all in order,
From cell to cell,
And from brother to brother,
Until the last one with the strawberries
To Macarius, at the door!
"Behold, father, you are ill!"
Macarius began to weep,
Seeing this wonderful brotherly love -
Neither did he want to eat.
He spilled them over the hot sand,
And, to God he gave thanks,
That the dead, arid desert,
Because of love, became Paradise.
The more a brother loves his brother
Than he loves himself:
"O Lord, the gift is this,
The gift of love, the gift from You!"

REFLECTION

Examples of the meek in enduring assaults such as we find in the Holy Fathers are simply amazing. Returning once from the path to his cell, Macarius the Great saw a certain thief removing his belongings from his cell and loading them onto a donkey. Macarius did not say anything to him but rather began to assist him to comfortably load all the things on the donkey, saying to himself, "For we brought nothing into the world" (I Timothy 6:7). Another elder, when the thieves stole everything from his cell, looked around, noticed that they did not take a bundle with money which lay hidden somewhere, and immediately took this bundle, called out to the thieves and gave that to them also. Again, a third elder came across thieves as they were robbing his cell and cried out to them: "Hurry, hurry before the brothers come that they may not prevent me to fulfill the commandments of Christ." "From the one who takes what is yours, do not demand it back" (St. Luke 6:30).

CONTEMPLATION

To contemplate the Lord Jesus as the Salt of the earth:
1. As the Salt which gives flavor to this life in general;
2. As the Salt which preserves mankind from decay, who would, otherwise, be totally decayed from one end of its history to the other;
3. As the Salt of my own life.

HOMILY

About victory over the world

"In the world you will have trouble, but take courage, I have conquered the world" (St. John 16:33).

The Only One and the Unique One, the Conqueror of the World, with these words, teaches His followers not to be afraid of the world.

Indeed, the world appears very strong; however, is not the One Who created the world, stronger than the world?

The world is very frightening for him who does not know that God rules the world and that He has the authority to hold it in existence as long as He wills and to return it into non-existence whenever He wills. But, to him who knows that, the world is not frightening.

Compared to Christ the Lord, this world is as a fabric woven of weakness itself; while in Christ the Lord, there is not a single weakness. To him who does not know that, the world is frightening and he who knows that, has no fear of the world.

The world has loaned us a body and because of that it wants to acquire our soul. How can the world overpower us if we stand as soldiers of the Conqueror of the world?

The Conqueror of the World gives us weapons for the battle. By His example, He teaches us how to fight it, reveals the hidden enemy, shows us the path of attack and retreat, holds us with His hand, protects us under His wing, feeds us by His Life-giving Body and more, He encourages us by shouting: "Take courage!" Brethren, what then can the world do when its defeat is sealed with the victory of Christ?
O Lord, the Conqueror of the World and our victorious commander, be close to us always that we may not become frightened and direct us, that we may always be close to You in heart, mind and soul.