

April 5

Macarius the Great (ca. 300-390) monk

Today the Coptic Church celebrates the memorial of Macarius the Great, who brought monastic life to the desert of Scetis.

Together with Antony, Macarius is unquestionably the most venerated of the Eastern monastic fathers. Born around the year 300 into a middle-class family, he worked as a camel trader in present-day Wadi al-Natrun. Falsely accused of seducing a young woman, he agreed to support her until his innocence was recognized. He then fled to the desert of Scetis, where he sought solitude in one secluded location after another.

Several brothers joined him, and Macarius managed to work out a balance of community and eremitical life. He founded a monastic settlement that became very large and is still flourishing today.

Macarius was a monk who was capable of extreme austerity in his own life, and yet he remained gentle and kind. He demanded a great deal of himself, but was so merciful towards others that he became a mirror of God's own mercy. On the basis of his sayings, Evagrius and the monks of Gaza developed their own teachings on the avoidance of anger and the importance of gentleness for every Christian, and in particular for those who are called to monastic life.

Macarius knew Evagrius personally, and he was also acquainted with Antony the Great, Palladius and Cassian. Most of what we know about Macarius' human and spiritual gifts comes from their testimony, as well as from the Sayings of the desert fathers.

Macarius died in his retreat in Scetis in 390, where he had always lived, except for a brief period spent in exile during the Arian persecutions.

BIBLICAL READINGS

Heb 11:17-31; Jas 1:12-21; Acts 19:11-20; Mt 4:23-5:16

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

WESTERN CATHOLICS:

Vincent Ferrer (d. 1419), presbyter (Roman and Ambrosian calendars)

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (27 baramhat/maggabit):

Macarius the Great, monk (Coptic Church)

Madhane calam (The Saviour of the world), memory of the crucifixion (Ethiopian Church)

LUTHERANS:

Christian Scriver (d. 1693), poet in Saxony

Pandita Mary Ramabai (d. 1922), missionary in India

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:

Claudius of Corinth and companions (d. ca. 251), martyrs

VETEROCATTOLICI:

Isidore of Seville (d. ca. 636), bishop