

ABBA ELIJAH THE HERMIT

Abba Elijah was one of the fathers from Tor-Sinai, and one of the spiritual sons of Abba Silwanis of Mount Sinai. He lived his life in ascetic order, just like Elijah the prophet. The cave in which he resided was several kilometres away from the monastery, and there he practised diligently praying and fasting, and was a true example of holiness and righteousness. He dwelt in his cave for fifty one years, during which time he increased daily in spirituality and he never delayed in partaking of the Holy Communion and attending the Holy Masses in the monastery without being seen.

One night, a brother from the monastery came to the saint to seek his blessings and ask him about his spiritual life. As he approached the saint's cave, he noticed strong rays of bright light shining forth from the cave's window. He was astonished and stood entranced over this sight for three hours. When the saint had completed his prayers, a pillar of light which stretched from his cave to the heavens, slowly faded.

The monk knocked on the saint's door, and when the saint came out, he could not bear to look at the saint's face because of the brilliant light which shone forth from him like the rays of a sun. The saint knew by the Spirit that this brother had seen the rays of light and the pillar of light which shone brightly during his prayers, and when he asked, "My son, have you seen anything unusual?" he answered, "Glory be to our Lord Jesus Christ who glorifies His saints!", so the saint realised that it was God's will that this vision be revealed to the brother.

As they sat together, the saint spoke words of spiritual wisdom and then turned to his new disciple, the brother, saying, "My son, I have avoided keeping company with fellow humans because I do not deserve their praise and honour; only God, glory be to Him, deserves all praise and honour. As for us mere men, we are weak and sinners, but do not dismay, for I shall pray with you in the monastery, however, some will see me and others won't..."

They embraced each other and then the disciple left, venturing into the wilderness until he came to a cave. He spent the next seven years praying without ceasing, and fed on the grass of the wilderness.

Seven years later, the saint visited his disciple's cave and knocked on its door. When the disciple saw him, he was greatly surprised and so he did the sign of the cross. The saint said to him, "Well done my son, for even demons appear in the form of saints!...I am Elijah your father." The disciple fell down and cried for he had not seen Abba Elijah for many years. The saint comforted him and said, "My dear son, did I not tell you that I do not prefer keeping company with other humans? I have been dwelling in my distant cave and attending the Holy Mass regularly in the monastery, but not everyone could see me." The disciple exclaimed, "But father, I never saw you!" to which the saint replied, "It was not God's will, but I have come to you now because it is time for me to leave this world and dwell in the place of Eternal living. So I ask you to please pray on me, and place my body in the cave where I lived my life in ascetism." Having said this, he embraced his disciple, prayed for a short while before stretching his body and delivering his soul.

His disciple cried bitterly for many days, and finally he went to the abbot of the monastery to tell him about the saint and his blessed departure. The abbot at once gathered the monastery fathers together and went to the cave of this righteous man. The fathers prayed on him and then buried him with great honour and respect, giving thanks and praise to God who glorifies His saints.

To Him is due all glory, honour and worship now and forever