

ABBA KARAS THE HERMIT

Abba Karas lived at the turn of the 6th century and was the brother of the great King Theodosios. Abba Karas' life story was written by Abba Bemwa; the one who buried the body of St. Elaria, the daughter of King Zenon. (He is not to be confused, however, with Abba Bemwa, the teacher of the two saintly fathers Abba Bishoy and Abba John the Short). This is Abba Karas' story, as was recorded by Abba Bemwa: One day I heard a voice saying to me, "Go quickly into the inner wilderness, for there you will meet Abba Karas who is greatly honoured by our Lord Jesus Christ because of the many hardships he has endured for the sake of His Holy Name." Immediately I got up and ventured into the wilderness, in search of the saintly father. I continued walking for many days without seeing anyone, and finally I noticed a nearby cave. I approached and knocked its door saying, "Bless me my father the saint!" I then heard the reply, "Blessed is your coming to me today Abba Bemwa, the priest of Sheheet, and the one whom God made worthy of burying the body of the pure saint Elaria, daughter of King Zenon!" I was greatly surprised at his response and his knowledge of my name, and when he opened his door, I quietly entered. He greeted me warmly, then we sat down together and spoke about the many wonders and glories of God. I marvelled at the strictness of his ascetism, and so I said to him, "Father, are there any other hermit fathers who dwell in this wilderness?" He sighed deeply and said, "There is one who dwells among us, whose footsteps the world is not worthy of, and his name is Abba Karas." I asked this blessed father sitting before me, "What is your name and what is your story?" to which he replied, "My name is Simon, and you are the first human I have seen in sixty years...I eat every Saturday, when God in His infinite love, provides me with a loaf of bread delivered on the doorstep to my cave..." After receiving Abba Simon's many blessings, I asked him to pray for me, before continuing my journey. I walked for three days before seeing another cave, and when I approached and knocked I heard a voice from within saying, "Blessed is your coming to me today Abba Bemwa!" and again I was greatly surprised. I asked him the same question I had previously asked Abba Simon, and he replied, "There lives one in the wilderness, whom the whole world is not worthy of. He speaks with God and God listens." I asked him, "Father, are you the blessed Abba Karas?" Humbly he answered, "Who am I to hear such words? I am but very poor and in no way comparable to Abba Karas, the friend of angels!...I

am Bamon and I have dwelt in this wilderness for twenty nine years, feeding on the fruits of this palm tree..." Once again, I asked this saintly father for his blessings before continuing with my search. As I journeyed within the inner wilderness, I heard a great voice which frightened me, and then all of a sudden I found myself standing at the entrance of a cave. I knocked its door and once more I heard the response, "Blessed is your coming to me today Abba Bemwa!" I entered and found before me a man who had the face of an angel. He had a long white beard and from him shone rays as bright as the sun. He looked very fragile and spoke in a soft voice. I knelt before him and said, "Hail to you my father the saint." He looked at me with gentle eyes and said, "My beloved brother, I have been waiting for you a long time, for with your coming today the Lord has permitted my departure." We sat together and I asked him to tell me about his life... "My name is Karas, and I have dwelt in this wilderness for fifty seven years, during which time I have not seen a fellow human..." As the sun began to set my blessed father Karas was suddenly struck by a severe fever, and in pain he kept sighing, "How can I escape Your judgement O Lord, and from Your Spirit where can I hide? O my Lord, how I fear the hour! Be merciful to me O Lord, because of my many sins!" I Bemwa marvelled at his words, for he was a great and saintly hermit father! On the 7th of Abib I found my father Abba Karas still feverish, but amidst his pain, his eyes were uplifted towards heaven, calmly, for a long time. He then said to me, "My beloved brother, one of our greatest pillars has passed away today in Upper Egypt. Indeed the world has lost a great saint, whom no one was worthy of his footstep, and he is Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite. But now he is resting in peace with our Lord." His illness was becoming progressively more severe, and on the 8th day of the blessed month of Abib, Abba Karas' angelic face shone brightly, and at midday an unbearably strong, bright light illuminated the cave, and there standing before us was our Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ, glory be to Him, together with the Archangels Michael and Gabriel and a host of angels praising and singing. As the Lord of glory approached the pure saint, Abba Karas said to Him, "My Lord and God, I ask You, for my sake to please bless Your servant Bemwa who has come to me from afar." So the Lord, glory be to Him, turned to me and said, "My peace be with you Bemwa, and My blessing come upon you." He then turned to Abba Karas and said, "Do not be sad My beloved one; death for you is not death but eternal life and

transformation from this passing world to the place of eternal joy and perfection." Our blessed Saviour then took unto Him the soul of the pure saint Abba Karas. I wrapped the body of the saint in cloth, and then left his cave. At the entrance, the Lord of glory, placed His hand on the cave to bless it, and suddenly it was as if the cave had no door. He bestowed upon me His peace, before ascending in great glory. On my return to the monastery, I passed by the caves of Abba Bamon and Abba Simon, and eventually I reached Sheheet. I told all the fathers about Abba Karas, whose life story is as sweet smelling incense to all those who hear it; for the Lord is glorified through His saints. Our church celebrates the feast of Abba Karas on the 8th of Abib each year. He is also mentioned in the church 'Tasbeha' and the Liturgy's Commemoration. May his blessings be with us all, amen.