

## **ABBA STRATIOS THE HERMIT**

During the reign of one of the Orthodox kings over Rome, there lived a Roman prince who was responsible for one hundred soldiers. Filled with the grace of God, he expressed to the king his desire to leave this materialistic world and seek the company of God as a monk in the wilderness.

He sailed to Alexandria and then travelled on foot to Tor Sinai...This took place two hundred years after the death of Abba John Aklimakos, the writer of 'The Ladder of Virtues of the Sinai Fathers, and Abba Anastasi of Sinai, the guardian of monks'. During Abba John's time, there were two hundred and fifty monks residing in the Sinai monastery.

Abba Stratios dwelt in this monastery in strict ascetism; being fervent in spirit and in the love of our Lord Jesus Christ, and so he was clothed with the 'eskeem' of monasticism.

After spending several years living within the monastery and serving his fellow brothers with sincere love, he asked his spiritual father for his blessings and permission so that he may venture into the wilderness to dwell there.

He left, taking with him a head covering and a palm branch and went praising God saying, "I will lift up my eyes to the hills, from whence comes my help? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Psalm 121:1,2).

He kept walking until the Lord led him to a cave within the inner wilderness, and there he dwelt, in strict ascetism and fervencies and relentless spiritual struggle. He fed on the grass which grew on nearby rocks and drank fresh water from natural springs. He spent all his days praying and fasting, and only when he felt the need, would he feed upon a handful of grass and a mouthful of water. He lived as such for twelve years...

The Lord revealed to him that after forty days, he will depart from this temporary world and be united with the beloved Lord Jesus Christ, and the whole host of saints and angels. When Stratios felt the hour of his death approach, he made the sign of the cross in the wind and immediately the wind carried him and brought him safely inside the monastery. There he met his

spiritual father who had aged very much, and when he saw Stratios, he asked, "Who are you?"

The saint replied, "I am your son Stratios, who resided with you in this monastery twelve years ago...I have come to you because my hour of deliverance is at hand, and I would like to spend the rest of my time on earth, here with my fathers in this monastery." His spiritual father embraced him with joy, then called all the monastery fathers to him, by ringing the bells. Immediately the fathers gathered and when they saw their fellow brother and hermit Stratios, they all rejoiced.

They gave him a separate cell, and after he entered, he closed the door...he then left the monastery without anyone seeing him, and went straight to the tomb of Abba John Aklimakos, the writer of the Sinai Fathers and Abba Anastasi. He knelt at Abba John's tomb so that the prayers of these blessed saints who lived two hundred years before him, may help him.

As he was kneeling and praying an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, "Stratios, the two saints John and Anastasi have come to you to bless you, O pure saint, before you depart from this world." Stratios immediately turned and saw the two saints saying to him, "We will also be present during your deliverance and the release of your soul, and we will pray for you in the cell your fellow brothers have given you." Having said this, they departed and Stratios returned to his cell.

He did not tell anyone of the things which took place, except his disciple to whom he said, "My son, after thirty seven days pass, open the door of my cell, as it will be the day of my deliverance...do not be neglectful in this command, for I want you to bury my body..."

As the day approached, they knocked on his door, but no one answered. So they pushed open the door of his cell and found him kneeling and covered from head to toe in rough cloth...Beside him they found a censor filled with coal and burning of sweet smelling incense. This signified that the hermit fathers had come to pray on him...

The monastery fathers prayed on him, then buried him with great reverence and honour in the place where their saintly forefathers had been laid. From his pure body came the beautiful scent of incense, which was a blessing to many.

To our Lord be all glory, honour and worship now and unto the

end of all ages, amen.