

ABBA GHALEON THE HERMIT

Abba Issac, the abbot of El Kalamon Monastery once said: There was a saint called Ghaleon who used to reside in this monastery. He was brought up in one of the villages in Upper Egypt, and God granted him the gift of performing miracles and healing the sick. He prayed and fasted diligently; only eating once a week. He was chosen to be the reader in the monastery, because he had a clear, strong voice. He read many church books and so became spiritually knowledgeable and wise. He also possessed many virtues.

He was consecrated as a monk while he was still in his youth, but took his spiritual life very seriously. He lived an ascetic life within his own cell, and only came out during prayer times. Daily the young saint increased in the love and fear of God, until the devil could no longer tolerate his spirituality and virtues. He therefore appeared to him as he was on his way to midnight prayers, disguised as a hermit saying, "Brother Ghaleon, I am one of twelve desert fathers who dwell in the wilderness. Today, however, one of my fellow desert dwellers passed away. Of course you realise that once one of the desert fathers die, he must be replaced, and so we are asking you brother Ghaleon, because of your love for solitude, to leave this monastery and come dwell with us in the wilderness." Having said this, the devil then vanished. The vision was so convincing that Ghaleon believed the Lord had sent His angel to deliver this message, and that it must have been God's will. Ghaleon began praying for this situation, and after the midnight prayers, he took his rod and quickly left from the monastery gate. He found before him eleven monks who approached and greeted him. He then followed closely behind them as they walked through the wilderness amidst the darkness of the night. They continued walking until midday when they reached a very high mountain, where no person, no food and no water was in sight. Suddenly the eleven monks began laughing wickedly saying, "We have hunted well tonight!" Then Ghaleon thought to himself, "These men could not be saints, but seem to be devils!" He quickly crossed himself and immediately the devils vanished

from his sight.

Ghaleon remained on the mountain feeling frightened and lost, and so began praying the Psalms of David: "I will love You O Lord my strength. The Lord is my rock and my fortress" (Ps18).

After praying this psalm three times, his fears were calmed and his heart was comforted. He looked around him and when he found no one, he began praying Psalm 6: "O Lord, do not rebuke me in Your anger...have mercy on me O Lord, heal me for my bones are troubled, and my soul is greatly troubled..!"

He then lifted his hands towards heaven and prayed, "Make haste O God to deliver me, make haste to help me O Lord..!"

(Ps70), then, "May the Lord answer you in the day of trouble. May the name of the God of Jacob defend you. May He send you help from His sanctuary..." (Ps20). Still being filled with despair he continued, "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..." (Ps121). Suddenly as he finished praying this psalm, he heard angelic voices in the distance.

Quickly he turned and saw three monks clothed in white garments approaching him while praising Psalm 97: "O sing to the Lord a new song for He has done marvellous things..!" Their voices resembled the voices of angels, and Ghaleon recognising the tune joined in their praising.

Because of his last experience, he had some doubt as to whether these monks were from God or not, but realising that demons could never utter the beautiful Psalms of David, his fears were put to rest. The four of them stood praying and praising from the psalms throughout the entire night, and when morning had dawned, they sat together and Ghaleon asked them where they were from : "We are monks from the monastery of Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite, but we are desert wanderers. It is not necessary for you to tell us your story, for it has been revealed to us by the Spirit that you have fallen victim to Satan's trap. So let us give thanks to our beloved Lord for His mercy and care."

At the foot of the mountain, they found a spring of fresh water which had been extracted from rocks, and within this spring the Lord supplied them with fish.

They took a fish and left it in the sun for a few days to cook before eating it.

Abba Ghaleon remained with these saintly fathers at the foot of the mountain for a year, then one night one of the three monks said, "Ghaleon, your spiritual father Abba Issac is praying to God that he may see you before your death, so arise quickly and return to him." Ghaleon replied, "But father, I do not know the way!" Immediately, the desert father took Ghaleon by the hand and said, "Follow us." He followed them closely and before

dawn he found himself standing at the door of the monastery. The three monks farewelled him before returning to their monastery of Abba Shenouda the Archimandrite.

"When Ghaleon entered the monastery, my heart rejoiced exceedingly and so I Issac embraced him saying, 'My dear son Ghaleon, where have you been?' So he began to tell me his story..."

After he had finished speaking, I Issac said to him, "Let me tell you what the Lord has revealed to me regarding you: when you were away in the wilderness, I prayed that God would tell me of your whereabouts, for I was worried about you. Then in my dream I saw someone saying to me, "Do not be concerned, for today you shall see Ghaleon in the flesh, and seven days later he will leave this world to enjoy eternal life with Jesus Christ, so take care not to forget this day!" Since you left this monastery my son Ghaleon, there has been no other like you; no one who reads like you or memorises the church songs and psalms like you. For this reason, I cried bitterly when I could not find you." There was a bright young boy called Moses whose love for God was great. He became the monastery's reader after Abba Ghaleon, so I presented him to Ghaleon and said, "Teach him the rites of the church and all the hymns", so he took the boy Moses and embraced him closely saying, "My son Moses, accept the Spirit who dwells in me, for on the seventh day I will pass away." And having said this, he breathed on him. Moses eagerly learnt from Abba Ghaleon and increased in the knowledge of church hymns and spiritual readings.

On the seventh day the blessed saint Abba Ghaleon delivered his pure soul to the Heavenly King. All the monastery fathers gathered together to pray on him and prepare his body for burial with all due reverence and honour.

To our Lord be all glory forever and ever, amen.