

Pachomius, the Great and Venerable

May 15

Where: Egypt
When: 3rd century
Known for: Founder of the [cenobitic](#) monastic life in Egypt

Pachomius was born in the third century in the Thebaid (Upper Egypt). His parents were not Christians but made sure Pachomius went to the best schools. Even as a child, he was known to be virtuous, prudent and sensible.

When Pachomius was 20 years old, he was sent to serve in the army of the emperor Constantine. All the new soldiers were housed in a prison in the city and were watched by the more experienced soldiers and officers. In this particular city, the local Christians fed the soldiers and took very good care of them.

Pachomius was surprised when he learned that these people acted this way because of their love for God. God commands us to love our neighbors, and these Christians were being obedient. This made a deep impression upon Pachomius, and he vowed to become a Christian. When Pachomius returned from the army after a victorious battle, he remembered his vow and received holy Baptism, moved to a lonely settlement in the desert and began to lead a strict ascetic life. After a while, he realized that he needed someone to help him grow spiritually. He went to a man who lived in the wilderness. His name was Palamon. Pachomius followed the advice and example of this wise man and was helped greatly.

After 10 years of living in the wilderness, Pachomius made his way through the desert, and stopped at the ruins of the former village of Tabennisi. Here he heard a Voice instructing him to begin a monastery in that place. Pachomius told the Elder Palamon what happened, and they both believed the words were a command from God.

Together they went to Tabennisi and built a small monastic cell, which is usually only big enough for one person. The holy Elder Palamon blessed the beginnings of the monastery and predicted its future glory. Soon after that Palamon departed to be with the Lord. An angel of God then appeared to Pachomius in the form of a [schemamonk](#) (a very high ranking monk) and gave him instructions for the monastic life. A little after that his older brother John came and settled there to live with him.





St. Pachomius endured many temptations and attacks from the Enemy of the race of man, but he resisted all temptations by his prayer and endurance. Gradually, others began to gather around St. Pachomius. He soon became known by his love for work, which enabled him to accomplish all kinds of monastic tasks. He cultivated a garden, he conversed with those seeking guidance, and he tended to the sick.

St. Pachomius introduced a monastic Rule of [cenobitic life](#) (which means the monks live together in a community and not alone), giving everyone the same food and clothes. It was important for the monks to follow the rules of the monastery, so that everyone would benefit. Some of the monks had the job of copying books by hand. None of the monks were allowed to have their own money nor to accept money or goods from their relatives. St. Pachomius also believed that it was important to obey with eagerness and joy. Those monks who didn't follow the rules were given consequences. Laziness was not permitted.

One day, his sister Maria came to visit him, but he told her that he could not see her at that time. Pachomius asked the gate keeper to bless her, encourage her to enter the monastic life and promised to help her accomplish this. Maria was very sad not to see her brother, but did as her brother told her. The monks built her a hut on the opposite side of the River Nile. Soon nuns began to join Maria, and a women's monastery was begun. They followed the same rules that Pachomius used at his monastery.

The number of monks at the monastery grew quickly, and it became necessary to build seven more monasteries in the area. The number of monks reached 7,000, all under the guidance of St. Pachomius who visited all the monasteries and

watched over them. Even though he was head of all the monasteries, St. Pachomius remained a deeply humble monk, who was always ready to comply with and accept the words of each brother.

Even though St. Pachomius was very strict with himself, he had great kindness toward the monks who were new at the monastery or who were struggling spiritually. One of the monks was particularly eager to become a martyr for Christ, but St. Pachomius gently turned him from this desire and instructed him to fulfill his monastic obedience, taming his pride, and training him in humility.

On another occasion, a monk did not heed his advice and left the monastery. He was attacked by robbers, who threatened to kill him and forced him to offer sacrifices to the pagan gods. Filled with despair, the monk returned to the monastery. St. Pachomius ordered him to pray night and day, keep a strict fast and live in complete solitude. The monk followed his advice, and this saved his soul from despair.

St. Pachomius cared for the sick monks with special love. He visited them, cheered the disheartened, urged them to be thankful to God and to put their hope in His holy will. He relaxed the fasting rule for those who were sick, if it seemed that this would help them recover their health.

Pachomius always taught the monks to rely only upon God's help and mercy. One time there was a shortage of grain at the monastery. The saint spent the whole night in prayer, and in the morning a large quantity of bread was sent to the monastery from the city at no cost. The Lord also granted St. Pachomius the gift of wonderworking and healing the sick.

One day, the Lord revealed to him the future of monasticism. The saint learned that future monks would not have such zeal in their struggles as the first generation had, and they would not have experienced guides. Prostrating himself upon the ground, St. Pachomius wept bitterly, calling out to the Lord and pleading for mercy for them. He heard a Voice answer, "Pachomius, be mindful of the mercy of God. The monks of the future shall receive a reward, since they too shall have occasion to suffer the life burdensome for the monk."

Toward the end of his life, St. Pachomius fell ill from a disease that spread in the region. His closest disciple, St. Theodore (we commemorate him on May 17), took care of him with tender love. St. Pachomius died around the year 348 a.d. at the age of 53, and was buried on a hill near the monastery.