



*Excerpts From:*

## *The Paradise Of The Holy Fathers*

### **The History of Abba Macarius (the Alexandrian) and a Certain Virgin**

**T**here was in Alexandria a certain virgin who though meek in appearance was of a haughty disposition. Now she was exceedingly rich and had possessions without number, but she never relieved the poor, and the strangers, and those who were in misery, and she never gave a drachma to the Church, and notwithstanding the frequent rebuke with which the Fathers rebuked her, she never allowed any portion of riches to leave her. And this woman had kinsfolk, and she adopted her sister's daughter, to

whom she used to promise by day and by night (to give her) all that she had, for she had fallen from heavenly love. Now, it is a customary thing which belongeth to the deception of Satan that he produceth avarice under guise of love of family, for that he hath no genuine care for kinsmanship is well known from the fact that he taught murder in order that he might make war (between) brethren, and is admitted by the Holy Book. And, if he imagined that he implanteth solicitude for kinsfolk in (the hearts of) men, (it must be remembered) that he is not moved to do this on their behalf because of his love for them, but only that he may minister unto his own will, for manifestly he knoweth the sentence of judgment which hath been passed, that the wicked shall not inherit the Kingdom of God (I Corinthians 6:9). For if a man be moved by spiritual understanding and by divine desire, he will be able to care for his kinsfolk if they be in want



*The Sanctuary of the Church of the Holy Virgin  
and the Door of the Prophecies (El Surian Monastery)*

without bringing himself into contempt; but if he devoteth the whole of himself to the care for his kinsfolk, and he bringeth himself into contempt by making himself to labor under poverty, he will fall from the divine law. And the divine man David singeth in the Psalms concerning those who possess themselves of the solicitude of the fear of God, and he saith, "Who shall go up into the mountain of the Lord?" (Psalm 24:3). Now, inasmuch as he saith, "Who," he maketh known concerning the smallness of number (who shall go up). And (again he saith), "Who shall stand in His holy place? He whose hands are clean and whose heart is chosen, and "who giveth not himself unto poverty" (Psalm 24:3-4). For those who devote themselves to poverty are those who think that the soul is dissolved with this body.

Now this virgin, who was so in name only, became a



stranger unto the various kinds of spiritual excellence. And there was a certain priest whose name was Marcarius (or Isidore) who wished to cut away as with iron and to lighten the weight of the possessions of those who loved money, and he had the care of, and was the governor (or secretary) of a house for the poor who were sick and infirm in their bodies. And this man thought out the following plan whereby he might entrap the virgin. From his youth up he had been a skillful workman in the cutting of gems, and he went to her and said, "Certain very precious emeralds and gems have fallen into my hands, and whether they have been stolen or not I do not know; their value cannot be ascertained, because they are above price, but the man who hath them will sell them for five hundred dinars. If thou wishest to take them thou wilt be able to recover the price of the five hundred dinars from the sale on one of the gems, and the rest thou wilt be able to employ in the adornment of they sister's daughter."

Now when the virgin heard this she was perturbed, and she fell down at his feet making entreaty unto him, and saying "I beseech you to let no other person take them." Abba Macarius saith unto her, "Come to my house and see them," but she would not consent to this; and she poured out for him five hundred dinars, and said unto him, "according to what thou dost require even so take, but I do not wish to see the man who is selling them."

And having taken the five hundred dinars he spent them on food and on things for the use of those who were hungry, and on the poor. And when much time had passed, inasmuch as he was a famous man in Alexandria—now this blessed man was well known for his love of God, and for the merciful disposition which was in him, and he was almost one hundred years old, and we also knew him and had tarried in his house with him—the virgin was ashamed to call

the matter (of the five hundred dinars) to his mind. But finally she found him in the church and said unto him, "I beseech thee to tell me how thou hast disposed of the gems for which we gave thee the five hundred dinars. And he answered and said unto her, "When thou gavest me the money I gave it for the price of the gems; if thou wishest come and see them in my house, for there are they deposited. Come and see them, if it pleaseth thee so to do, and if thou wilt not then take my money."

So she went with him joyfully. Now the place to which she went was a house of the poor; in the upper parts thereof were lying women whose bodies were destroyed, and in the lower parts were men. And when they had come there Marcarius brought her in through the door, and said unto her, "Which wouldst thou see first, the emeralds or the gems?" She said unto him, "Whichever thou pleasest." Then he took her up to the upper parts of the house and showed her the women whose faces and bodies were diseased and deformed, and said unto her, "These are the gems; and brought her down to the lower parts, and showed her the men, and said unto her, "These are the emeralds. If these please thee good and well; but if not "take thy money."

Then was the virgin ashamed, and she went forth and departed, and by reason of her grief she fell forth into a sickness, because it was through God and of her own will that she had in this wise performed this matter. Finally, however, she came to herself, and was exceedingly grateful to the priest, and as for the maiden for who the wedding feast she was laying up her riches, she died.

*In the next issue of the Mighty Arrows we shall read about the "whip" that hangeth from a tree to punish those monks of the Mount of Nitria who transgress through folly....*