



# Father Anastasi

## ANASTASI

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117th Pope of Alexandria and Patriarch of See of St Mark

*This is a fictional story written by His Holiness:*

**F**ather Anastasi was stunned when he awoke and felt as though there was a handkerchief on his face. When he lifted up his hand in order to remove it, something suddenly fell. On running his hand over what had fallen, he discovered that it was a cross.

**Darkness was everywhere. This surprised Father Anastasi greatly,** as he remembered that the window of his cell was open when he had gone to bed, and that moonlight penetrated the whole place, illuminating the room with light.

**And what about this strange smell? He tried to find out its secret but could not.** It was like the smell of the dead.

**After some time had passed, his eyes became accustomed to the dark,** so he looked carefully, wishing that he would be able to see. It was then that he shuddered with fear and fright, and his whole being was disturbed. He covered his eyes with his hands, hoping to wipe out the sight.

**But when he lifted his hands, he found the view unchanged:** bones heaped in corners and bodies lying around him on the floor. Each of these bodies was dressed in white sticharion (tuniah), with a handkerchief on its face and a cross in its hand. There was no doubt that he was in the monastery's cemetery. It was then that a strange thought came to his mind. He tried to drive it away, but in vain.

**Unconsciously, he looked at himself.**

When he did so, he found that he himself was dressed in a white sticharion. The part of his beard that he could see was all white, although as far as he could remember, he only had a few white hairs. He realized the astounding truth; he was in the cemetery.

**What had happened? Had he really died and God raised him from death?** Had the monks thought him to be dead and buried him by mistake? Was there a third possible explanation? He did not know. He, however, had to face one clear fact, that he was dead in the eyes of people. He also learned another fact, and that was that he had no way out of this situation. How could people face a man that they themselves buried? Neither their nerves nor minds could bear that.

**Thus, he had to spend the rest of his life inside the cemetery,** but this was a new experience for him. How could he live like that? The first day was very hard for him. The smell was odious, rotten; he could not stand it, but he said to himself: "I am supposed to have left the luxuries of the world and I have to live a life like this."

**He remembered the story of Saint Arsenius** who would leave the water in the tub to rot, and then he would say to himself that his rottenness would compensate for the sweet scents that he used to enjoy in the emperor's place. Soon enough, Father Anastasi became used to the situation. He became used to living among the bones and



*Saint Arsenius*



bearing the stench.

**One problem was left; the food. How would he eat?**

He did not have any kind of food in the cemetery. It was not possible to bring food from the monastery and keep it. Instead, he went out every night in the dark, about midnight, and ate either some vegetables and fruits from the garden in the monastery, some left-over in a dish that the cook might have forgotten to wash, or just a piece of bread with little salt. That was sufficient. After that, he would fast for the rest of the day, until midnight and the following day came. He did not eat in the daylight for many years. In fact, he did not see the sun for many years.

**It goes without saying that in the cemetery, Father**

Anastasi had neither utensils nor dishes. This reminded him of how he had kept in his cell tens of kitchen utensils and different types of food. Now, he had none of these. He lived with absolutely nothing in his cell. At this point, Father Anastasi felt ashamed, for while he was a monk, he used to keep things, which seemed to be necessary to him at the time, whereas now, it was practically proven that he could live without them.

**This also reminded him of other equipment, which**

he used to keep for himself at that time, such as: stationary, furniture, pictures, clothes, coverings, and many other things. His conscious severely convicted him for this, as he wondered: "What was the meaning of poverty which he had vowed on the day he was consecrated? Where was the virtue of freedom from worldly possessions?"

**He started thinking of the question of 'necessities'**

and 'luxuries'. This was undoubtedly a relative matter, which depended upon the person's devotion and his evaluation of his needs. It was now possible for Father Anastasi to live a life full of devotion in the monastery, not owning anything at all, even a private cell. Now, he

lived in the cemetery, which he could not consider his private cell, which no one could enter, without his permission. He could open it and lock it as he wished, using a key that only he could carry.

**Now, he had no control over the place in which he**

lived. If they brought in a newcomer, he could not object, or even utter a word. As soon as he heard the sorrowful chimes of the monastery bell, he hurried to his place, as a dead person, lying in the same way and covering his face with the handkerchief, so that if they opened the door to bury the newly dead, they would find everything just as they had left it.

**Father Anastasi owned absolutely nothing, not even**

books. How, then, would he spend his time? This made him realize how mistaken he previously was. Earlier, his aim was to fill his mind with information; he read tens of books so that he would be a living encyclopedia. He sometimes had no time to meditate on what he read, but now he no longer had any books, he started to ruminate the information stored in his memory and meditate upon it.

**Sometimes he spent several days meditating on one**

verse, delving into its depths, the Holy Spirit revealing to him strange secrets, to the extent that he would cry out in joy with David; "I have seen the consummation of all perfection, your commandment is exceedingly broad." He discovered that earlier, he had lived on empty shells of superficial knowledge. When the need for reading pressed him, he went in the dark to the church, silently read a little, and then returned.

**Father Anastasi lived in total seclusion and quiet.**

Of course, he visited no one and no one visited him. He also lived in total silence, talking to no one. It happened once that some monks were talking by the cemetery. He heard their voices, but made no comments. Whether the information was true or false, or whether it was

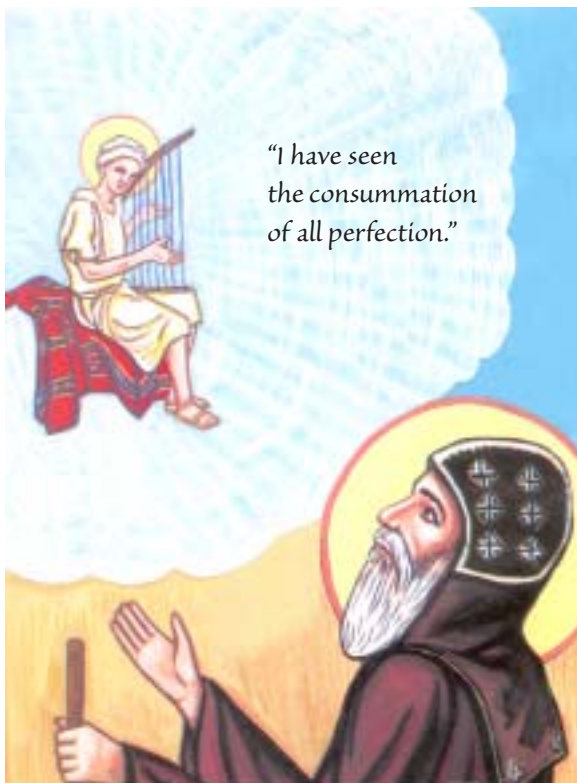


complete or incomplete, he had no right to interfere. It was none of his business. He was dead. Once, he overheard some monks talking about the deceased fathers. Then, they mentioned his name. Some of the monks praised him and others criticized, while he remained silent. He neither thanked the former nor argued with the latter. He was dead.

**One day, Father Anastasi** fell ill. Of course, no doctor came to see him. He had no treatment, no nutrition, and no tonics. He endured silently and quietly. He did not even hear a comforting word, as no one came to see him. Sometimes he could not even cry in pain when he heard someone outside the cemetery. He remained thus until he was cured.

**It once happened that while he was walking by night,** two monks saw him, one fled in fear, and the other mistook him for one of the earlier saints, so he knelt down and asked his blessing. He did not argue, but rather complied. He put his hand over the monk's head and blessed him, and then he fled back to the cemetery. The news spread in the whole monastery that a saint had appeared to some monks. Consequently, Father Anastasi was confined to the cemetery for several days. He neither ate nor drank.

**Father Anastasi lived in total isolation from the world and from people.** Earlier, he used to write letters to many people and he received their replies. But now,



he was dead. Thus, he was far from any source of news, whether in the form of letters, magazines, newspapers, or the like. The news of the world and the Church did not reach him. Not even the news of the monastery reached him. As time passed, he also forgot all the bad news.

**Earlier, Father Anastasi felt** that the monastery needed him and that he was one of its pillars, an important person with various responsibilities. Now, he discovered that with or without him, the monastery was always the same, so was the Church. Sometimes there were vacant positions or responsibilities, but no one nominated him for them, as he was dead. He did not even think of such matters and he did not hear about them.

**As nothing occupied Father Anastasi except God,** he lived the life of incessant prayer. Earlier, he spent many nights in reading, writing, translating, composing, copying manuscripts; things that did not have to do with his soul. But now, he could not read and write at night, as there were neither books nor light. Thus, he spent the whole night in prayer. He remembered Saint Isaac's saying: "The night was made especially for prayer." He greatly grew in prayer, until his whole life became a prayer. Nothing occupied his thoughts except God. With the passing of time, old memories of the world faded away as he had nothing new to add to them. Thus, his subconscious was cleansed from all the worldly news, memories, and concerns. Consequently, he no longer



strayed in his prayers. He started to achieve cleanliness of the heart and of thoughts; freedom in all union with the One.

**Father Anastasi was freed from all evil thought. Only** one thought still attacked him. He said to himself: “Now that I have know real monasticism and experienced total death to the world and union with God, what would prevent me from going to the monastery and leading the same kind of life?” He was encouraged to have this thought by the fact that he had lived so long in the cemetery that people had forgotten him. He saw many of his earlier colleagues buried in the cemetery with him. Most of the monks were newcomers who would not know him. The rest of his colleagues were very few, and they would not expect to see him. Even if they did, they would not recognize him as his appearance had totally changed due to age and asceticism.

**Father Anastasi tried to drive this thought away,** saying to himself: “What is the point if people see me? I had always longed to live in seclusion, away from people, and be devoted only to God. Now I have everything I had wished for, so why should I think of changing my situation?” But the thought attacked him once more, saying: “You did this because you had no other choice. How wonderful would it be to do it out of your own will!” He fought these thoughts for quite a long time.

**One night warring thoughts attacked Father** Anastasi severely, so he knelt and poured his feelings before the Lord in warm prayers, saying: “May you be praised for all Your goodness to me. You are very merciful and tender to me. You have treated me as I have not deserved, giving me a life of seclusion. You have freed me from everything else and united me to You. However, I feel that I have undergone this discipline involuntary. Now I want to live it out of my own free will, out of love for You. This is a thought, a

desire. It might be good or bad, but in any case, I put it before You because I cannot hide anything from You. Your will be done.”

**Father Anastasi fell asleep, his white beard soaked** with tears. He was not aware how long he had slept, whether for an hour or an age. All that he realized was the violent sound of a ringing bell. It was the midnight bell that he was accustomed to hearing every night in the cemetery. Father Anastasi opened his eyes; he was amazed. He said to himself: “What Is this that I see?” He felt dizzy and fell asleep once more. He woke up again at the sound of another bell; perhaps it was the bell of morning prayers.

**On opening his eyes, Father Anastasi saw the original** view again. His surprise grew. Before him was an open window through which moonlight came in and illuminated the whole place. When he looked at himself, he found that he was dressed in black. When he looked at the place around him, he found that it was like the old cell in which he lived. He placed his hand on his head to start to think. Finally, he realized the secret. Was what happened a dream, a vision or lesson in monasticism? He was not sure, but he realized the purpose behind it.

**From that time. Father Anastasi's life changed** completely. He started a life of seclusion and asceticism to which he had been accustomed for tens of years. He started practicing the incessant prayer as he used to do in the cemetery. When he had to leave the cell for matters related to the monastic community, he walked silently, looking neither to the left nor to the right. The monks knew him for his silence, his slim body, his courtesy, his humility and his head, which was permanently bowed to the ground. From time to time, he lifted his head a little and tilted it slightly in order to release some tears that veiled his eyes and prevented him from seeing what lay ahead.