

St. Moses the Black (also called “the Strong” or “the Ethiopian”) is one of the most beloved saints in our Coptic Church. His life inspires all of us as Christians to put temptations behind us and die for what we believe. However, there is more to contemplate on his life than simply the story of a sinner turned saint

As a young man, St. Moses had been estranged from God, and his heart was extremely far from Him. Sold into slavery, young St. Moses worked for a man in high authority in Egypt. This man and his household worshipped the Sun, so St. Moses also took up the idea that the Sun is God. As a slave, St. Moses developed a horrible reputation and was suspected so often for committing local crimes that his master could no longer control him and eventually let him go. Because of his imposing figure and reckless way of life, St. Moses then joined a gang and became the leader of seventy bandits. Now, St. Moses had questioned his God (the Sun) many times, and even said “O God, whom I do not know, let me know you.” One day, however, his life changed drastically. A man informed the saint that the monks of Shiheet knew the true and only God. St. Moses did as the man said, and eventually came to Der El-Baramouse at Wadi El-Natroun. The monks were shocked and terrified when he entered in, but he let them know that he came seeking the real God, the Creator. St. Isidoros the Priest was at first fearful of his appearance, but gladly took St. Moses under his wing. St. Isidoros then took St. Moses to the great father Anba Macarius, who instructed him on the faith of the Coptic Church, baptized him, and received him as a fellow monk in the monastery.

St. Moses endured a brutal spiritual fight against the devil, encountering him in Satan’s own wretched and gruesome form. He tempted his former slave with his old habits of gluttonous eating and drinking. According to *The Paradise of the Holy Fathers*, St. Moses, in order to fight off his bad habits, made a promise to God

that he wouldn’t sleep the entire night or bend his knees in his cell, where he remained for seven years. He slept standing up with his eyes open for the entire night. St. Moses fought diligently and received regular advice from St. Isidoros on how to conquer evil. He excelled in fasting, prayer, and humility, as his heart advanced closer to God. One story regarding the saint said that at night, while the other monks slept, St. Moses would collect the water pots from each cell and return them full of water from a well far away.

Along with his devotion to God and spiritual matters, these acts he performed outraged Satan. The devil caused a sore to appear on St. Moses’ foot that made the saint extremely ill. Fortunately, the strong saint realized that this ailment was given to him from Satan; so, St. Moses prolonged in his prayers and humility, to the point that it is written, “his body became as a burnt wood” (*Coptic Synaxarium Volume IV*).



by Joshua kladius

From that moment on, the strong St. Moses would no longer be pursued by the devil.

After some time in the monastery, St. Moses became a mentor and spiritual captain for more than 500 monks. His disciples nominated him for the priesthood. After speculation by the patriarch at that time, it was apparent that St. Moses should be granted the position. On another day, St. Moses set out with some elders to visit Anba Macarius the Great. He notified them that one of them would die for Christ as a martyr. St. Moses stood up among them and said “Probably it is me, for it is written: ‘for all who take the sword will perish by the sword.’” (Matthew 26: 52).

Shortly thereafter, a group of Barbarians attacked the monastery. The saint told those who were with him, “Whoever wants to escape, let him escape.” When they heard this, they tried persuading him to escape as well. St. Moses refused, however, and was martyred by the Barbarians with seven other brothers. A certain monk who was hiding saw an angel in the midst of his brethren, holding a crown and waiting. The monk went out and also gained the Kingdom and the crown of martyrdom. This occurred on the 24th day of Baouna.

What a great marvel it is, to have such a remarkable saint belong to our Faith. St. Moses the Black was an aggressive slave to the devil and to others, but now is a humble and willing servant to God and His people. He came to the wilderness black as coal in his sins, but left it with his soul as white as snow. He entered the monastery a leader of seventy criminals, but left the world a father of 500 stewards of the Lord. You do the math.

May his prayers, and the prayers of all the saints be with us, and glory be to God forever. Amen.