

SCANDALS IN THE CHURCH

- More Edifying Narrations -

The Bishop Who Was Tied to the Church's Pillar

Our holy and Godbearing elder told us that in one Ethiopian village near Gaza there was a pious and almsgiving bishop. Yet, because of a demonic temptation, he fell into the sin of fornication, with a Jewish woman, in fact, -- the Christians and Jews lived in that area all intermingled. She too, aside from this sin, was very almsgiving and devout. The bishop, on his part, admonished her daily to embrace our faith and to receive Holy Baptism. He told her:

“Though both of us are sinners, we should, at least, keep our faith sound and true. Our Saviour, our Lord Jesus Christ told us, ‘unless a man be born of water and the Spirit, he shall not enter the Kingdom of the Heavens’ (John 3:5).”

But she would not obey him, and she said:

“With the faith that I was born, with that same faith shall I die. I am not about to believe in the God in which you believe. If, as you say, I cannot be saved without Baptism, would that my life, at least, were in order and blameless.... And if I couldn't be saved, would that I could become like Sarah, like Rebecca, and like Susanna...!”

And he said to her:

“Believe me, God will not allow me to die in this sin, because I know God's great love for mankind, and I know that He will first give me an opportunity to repent, and then He will take me. But as for you, before the hour of your death, God will take you as a Christian, and not with the faith that you now hold!”

After a little while, he said to her:

“You must, in any case, come one day to our church, and there you will behold what faith our Christians have in God, but even in me, the sinner!”

To this, she replied:

“Yes, this I can do, but don't force me to do anything else.”

She agreed, therefore, and went to the church. At the time when the bishop entered, she saw him in all his radiant majesty, together with his entourage, for it was a great feast. When the time came in the Divine Liturgy for the bishop to approach the Holy Table, the Jewish woman – by a divine dispensation that opened her eyes – saw a luminous man with indescribable beauty and comeliness come out of the sanctuary, and lay hold of the bishop, and tie him to a pillar of the church's structure. Then he took the bishop's place in the Liturgy, together with the presbyters and deacons. When it came time for him to elevate the Holy Bread, the Jewish woman saw an Infant being elevated in his hands and being cut into portions, and afterwards the radiant man imparted these portions to the faithful to commune. When the faithful who partook finished, she saw that same Infant again, but now whole and intact, shining like light and fire! As he finished the Divine Liturgy with the Dismissal, the radiant man went and loosed the bishop from the church's pillar, and then he vanished.

On seeing this marvel, the Jewish woman left the church and ran home quickly. There she began to weep and to say:

“Lord, count me also worthy to become a Christian, and afterward to die in this faith.”

In a little while, the bishop came to her house. He drew near her and said:

“Did you see what a marvelous faith we Christians have, and how all of us pray to God and beseech Him with tears?”

Then she said to him:

“Would that I had seen you also in that state!”

At this point, she sat down and told him in detail all that she had seen at the Divine Liturgy, while tears streamed from her eyes during all that time.

The bishop, like one hearing these things from God Himself, finally collected himself and said:

“Know that from this day henceforth, I am giving myself over completely to repentance, and I am leaving for a monastery, where I will weep for my sins every day for the rest of my life...”

She interrupted him, and aflame with a godly zeal in her heart, she fell at his feet and said:

“I beg you, do not leave me here in this state, but baptize me and make me a Christian, and place me in a convent. Afterward, go with joy on the path that you have chosen. Because, from this moment, I too entrust myself to God, and confidently go wherever He leads me.”

Then, without delay, the bishop baptized her and placed her in a convent. As for himself, laying his episcopal vestments on the Holy Table, he espoused the monastic life. In fact, he progressed so much in the ascetical life and in virtue, he attained to the state of receiving the gift of clairvoyance, and even of working miracles after only three years, and thus he reposed in the Lord.

You see, my brethren, that virtue, especially almsgiving, is never lost. May we also be not heedless, and may we be watchful until our final breath, glorifying and entreating the Holy God.

Women of the Desert: The Small Book of the Holy Elders,
Vol. 3, pp. 216-220 [in Greek]

The Bishop Who Laid Aside His Omophorion

In a certain city there was a bishop who, by the working of the devil, fell into fornication.

Therefore, on a day when there was a church assembly, though no one knew of his sin, of his own accord, he confessed his fall before all the people and said:

“I have fallen into fornication.”

Then he laid his omophorion on the Holy Table, and announced:

“I can no longer be your bishop.”

And all the people cried aloud and said with many tears:

“Let this sin be on us, only remain our bishop!”

He replied:

“If you want me to remain your bishop, you must do what I tell you.”

After he ordered them to lock the church doors, he threw himself prostrate on the floor in front of one small side door, and he said:

“Whoever exits this church and does not step on me, is not of God.” After they had done what he commanded, and the last of the faithful had left the church, a voice was heard from Heaven, which said:

“Because of his great humility, I have forgiven his sin.”

The Great Book of the Holy Elders,
15:173 [in Greek]

The Dead Dog

“A man used to confess for some fifteen years to one father confessor. As he was going to see him again to make his confession, he found him committing fornication with a woman, and he said to himself, ‘Oh, woe is me! I’ve been going for confession so many years to this man, and now I am going to be damned! Whatever sins he forgave me are all unforgiven!’

“Saying this, he departed straightway.

“While on the road, he thirsted. He went to a brook that was flowing nearby with clear water, and he said, ‘If this water is so clear at this spot, then how much better must it be at its source?’

“He bent down and drank.

“Going uphill, he reached the source of the brook, and there he saw to his dismay that the water was spouting out of the mouth of a dead dog. He groaned and said, ‘Alas, I have infected myself!’

“Then an angel of the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘Why were you not infected when you first drank the water, but now that you have seen it coming out of a dead dog’s mouth you have despised it? Mayhaps the water is not God’s creation, like the sky, the earth or the other things? If the dog is unclean, don’t grieve; the water is not his. Likewise with the father confessor who confessed you: the forgiveness belongs to the All-holy Spirit. Since he [i.e. the priest] bears the mark of the priesthood, he is superior to both kings and angels. If he was a fornicator, what concern is that of yours? He is the dead dog’s head; don’t grieve. All the sins that he forgave you are forgiven. Now go and prostrate yourself before him, and beseech him to forgive you. As for him, God will examine him.’ And straightway, the angel vanished.

“Therefore, the man went back to his father confessor, and told him everything, and then he prostrated himself before him, as the angel had told him. When the father confessor heard this account, he wept, he repented and was saved. Likewise, we also must condemn ourselves, and we will be saved.”

St Cosmas of Aitolia
(Cosmas of Aitolia: His Teachings and Biography,
John B. Menounos, Tinos, 4th Edition,
pp. 231-232 [in Greek]

The Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian

As Orthodox Christians know, the Prayer of Saint Ephraim the Syrian is recited frequently during the holy services of Great Lent – a time of careful introspection and heartfelt contrition. Would that this Prayer brought us all to a proper and true understanding of ourselves and of our Holy Faith:

O Lord and Master of my life, a spirit of idleness, curiosity, ambition, and idle talk give me not.

But a spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love, bestow upon me Thy servant.

Yea, O Lord King, *grant me to see mine own failings and not to condemn my brother*; for blessed art Thou unto the ages of ages. Amen.