

# **SAINT PISHOY**

## **THE PERFECT MAN, BELOVED OF OUR GOOD SAVIOUR**

The great Saint Abba Pishoi was born in the village of "Shinsha" in the "Menoufia" Province of Egypt, in the year 320 A.D. His parents were devout and righteous abounding in every good work. Pishoi was the youngest of seven brothers. While still in his childhood, his father departed to Paradise leaving his mother to look after the seven children.

### **THE VISION**

One night, his mother saw a vision; an Angel of the Lord standing before her and saying: "The Lord sayeth give me one of thy children that he may serve me all the days of his life". The mother answered saying: "Behold, all my children are before thee, choose whomsoever pleaseth thee". And the Angel stretched out his hand and touched the forehead of little Pishoy. Now Pishoi was of a lean body, and the mother answered and said: "This is the weakest among them all, choose a stronger one my Lord". But the Lord who searches the hearts and is no respecter of person has already chosen the blessed Pishoi to serve Him.

### **IN THE WILDERNESS OF SCETIS**

At age 20 (circa A.D. 340), Pishoi left into the wilderness of Scetis (or Ascete, from which the word "Ascetic" was derived), where he met the great Abba Pambo (pronounced Pamwo). This great teacher was a Disciple of Saint Macarius the great, and the teacher of Abba John the Dwarf. This great Saint trained the young Pishoi in the tradition of the great Ascetics of the wilderness of Egypt. Through his obedience and strife, he soon earned a place among the monks and was vested in the Monastic garb by his teacher who surnamed him "the Luminous".

When Abba Pambo departed to Paradise, Abba Pishoi remained with his friend Abba John the Dwarf in the place where the "Tree of obedience" grew. It may be appropriate at this point, to digress a little to recount the story of this tree. In order to train Abba John the Dwarf to be obedient, the great Abba Pambo gave him his staff and asked him to plant it and water it every day. Abba John the dwarf did this unquestioningly for three years, at the end of which the staff started to grow leaves and brought fruit. And the great Abba Pambo carried some of the fruits and went around the brethren offering them a taste of the fruit of the "Tree of obedience".

Abba Pishoi gradually increased his ascetic efforts so much so that he fasted for one week at a time and when he ate, he only ate bread and salt. He memorized many of the books of the Scripture, while keeping the tradition of the Desert Fathers: weaving baskets while reciting his Psalmody. One book of the Scripture that had a special place in his heart was the book of Jeremiah, which he often read. At times the Prophet Jeremiah would appear to him explaining the Scripture.

### **HIS SOLITUDE**

Although he enjoyed the company of his friend John the Dwarf, yet deep inside him was a burning desire for the solitary life. Now Abba John the dwarf perceived in his spirit that desire and one day spoke to him saying: "I know that you are thinking about the solitary life and so am I, so let us spend the whole night in prayer that God may grant us discernment regarding this matter". And indeed the Angel of the Lord declared unto them that they are to depart, with John staying in the place where they both used to live. And Pishoi arose early in the morning and went two miles south of that place where he found a cave, and he lived there for three years where he set his eyes on no one. He exercised his Asceticism more diligently, and practiced continuous prayers, and long vigils, always recalling the Master's words: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it".

### **THE LORD APPEARS TO HIM**

One day while standing for prayer, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and spoke to him saying: "Pishoi my chosen one!" The Saint started to tremble and fell on his face but the Lord held him by the hand and raised him up speaking to him in comforting words.

Abba Pishoi increased his ascetic labours, praying and fasting, and the Lord appeared to him once more encouraging and strengthening him.

In a short while the aroma of his virtues filled the wilderness round about him, and many monks gathered around him to be his disciples.

Although leading separate lives, Abba Pishoi and Abba John the Dwarf visited often to talk about the things pertaining to the Kingdom of Heaven.

### **A VISIT FROM A SYRIAN SAINT**

One of the great Syrian Ascetics, Saint Ephreim the Syrian (surnamed the Harp of the Spirit) was once praying, when it was revealed to him that there is a man in the wilderness of Scetis named Pishoi that was his equal in piety. Immediately he arose and took a ship to Alexandria, and from there he travelled by land to Scetis. He met with Abba Pishoi, they embraced each other and prayed together. There was a problem however, neither of them knew the language of the other. Abba Pishoi lifted his eyes to heaven and asked the Lord that he may give him understanding, and immediately the Lord revealed to him what Abba Ephreim was saying. Abba Ephreim stayed with him for one week then he returned to Syria.

### **IN THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD**

The monks in the wilderness knew about the repeated appearances of the Lord to Abba Pishoi, and they were filled with the desire to witness the appearance of the Lord. Abba Pishoi prayed, asking the Lord to appear to the brethren that they may be strengthened, and the Lord promised that he will appear on a certain date. Abba Pishoi told the brethren and they were very happy. Early in the

morning of that day, every one started walking up the mountain where the Lord said He would appear. Every one wanted to be there first. Walking at the end of the trail was a frail old man who could hardly make it up the mountain, whom hardly any one noticed except for the compassionate Abba Pishoi, who went to him and asked if he could carry him up the mountain. At first the old man felt so light but gradually he became heavier and heavier until Abba Pishoi realized that he was actually carrying the Lord. Abba Pishoi trembled and cried saying: "My Lord, the heavens are not large enough to contain Thee, and the earth trembleth before Thy Majesty, so how can a sinner like myself carry Thee ?". And the Lord comforted him and told him that because he carried Him, his body shall not see corruption. Abba Pishoi went up the mountain to watch the other monks looking up to heaven and waiting to see the Lord , but he told them that the Lord came but the eyes of their hearts were blinded so they could not see Him.

### **WASHING THE MASTER'S FEET**

One of the virtues in which the great Saint excelled was his hospitality towards strangers. One day he noticed a man walking far off and immediately he went towards him and insisted that he come in to rest his feet. He brought him into his cell and brought water to wash his feet. The "stranger" spoke and Pishoi was filled with awe, "My chosen one Pishoi, thou blessed old man" said the "stranger", and Pishoi prostrated himself before the Lord. Abba Pishoi washed the feet of the Lord then the Lord departed from him. He drank the water but kept a little for his disciple. When the disciple came, Abba Pishoi told him to drink of the water but he would not. But when he saw that the Saint was not pleased with him he finally went to the pot but the water was gone. He came and prostrated himself before Abba Pishoi asking him the truth about the water . The Saint told him and he cried bitterly realizing that he was punished for his disobedience.

### **THE FLIGHT INTO EGYPT**

In the year 408 A.D. hordes of the "Berber" attacked the monasteries in Scetis devastating the place and killing many of the monks. Saint John the Dwarf came to his friend Pishoi and told him: "my brother, the Berber are coming, and although I am not afraid to die, yet I donot wish that one of them would go to Hell because of killing me, so I am thinking of going into Egypt. Abba Pishoi was pleased with his friends' discernment and decided to go with him. They both departed from scetis into the Valley of the Nile. Saint John the Dwarf into the Monastery of Saint Anthony and his friend Abba Pishoi settled in upper Egypt in the town of Ansana. There, Abba Pishoi met another monk who was to become a companion and a friend to the old man. This monk was no other than Saint Paul of Tamouh. They visited each other frequently, prayed often together and encouraged each other. Because they loved each other, it was revealed to Abba Pishoi that their bodies shall be buried together.

### **HIS DEPARTURE**

Many years passed, and Abba Pishoi was close to a hundred years old, and the Lord recalled to Him

his chosen one. Abba Pishoi gave up the Ghost in Ansana on July 15, 417 A.D. The brethren layed his body to rest with great honour, as befits a great Saint of the Church. He was burried just outside Ansana. Three months Later, his friend Abba Paul of Tamouh also reposed in the Lord and was burried beside his friend Abba Pishoi.

At a later date, a Monastery bearing the name of the Saint was established in Ansana, and the Monks wanted to transfere the body of Abba Pishoi into the Monastery. So, they brought the body into a boat to transfere it there, but the boat would not move for two days. Now there happened to live in that area an old monk full of the Holy Spirit, and the name of the monk was Armanius. This monk was moved by the spirit to reveal to the brethren that the Lord has promised the two Saints that their bodies shall be together. Immediately the brethren brought the body of Saint Paul of Tamouh and the boat smoothly glided to its destination. The two bodies were put in one Coffin and remained in that monastry till 842 A.D. During that time, miracles of cure were widely reported all the time.

## **THE RETURN TO SCETIS**

During the Papacy of Abba Yousab, the 52nd Pope of Alexandria, the Church lived in relative peace. The Pope made a visit to the Monastries of Scetic during Easter. while there, the monks asked the Pope to help them bring bck the body of their blessed father Abba Pishoi, into the place where he lived, and taught. So, the Pope wrote two letters, one to Abba Youannis Bishop of Ansana, and one adressed to the people of Ansana so that they hinder not the transfere of the body. As soon as the messages of Pope Yousab were received, the monks carrying the messages were lead into the Monastery where the bodies were kept (about one mile south of the Town). The bodies of both Abba Pishoi and Abba Paul of Tamouh were then transferred into a new coffin and taken to the house of Abba Youannis the Bishop, until a boat was found to transport the bodies to Babylon (Old Cairo). From there, the bodies were carried on a donkey into the holy wilderness of Scetis. On arrival, the monks went out to meet the bodies carrying palm leaves and olive branches, with censors and candle tapers. The monks spent the whole night singing praises to the Lord. This historical day was the fourth day of the blessed month of Kiahk in the year 558 A.M. according to the coptic Calendar. May their holy blessings be with us. Amen.