

PRAYERS OF THE DESERT

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INTRODUCTION

DATING from the early centuries of undivided Christianity (ca. 3rd–4th centuries), the founders of monasticism in deserts of Egypt have left us tremendous treasures that speak to us across the centuries. These writings are a testament to the Spirit of God which inspired them, and their words have much to offer us today.

THE RULE OF SAINT PACHOMIUS

SAINT Pachomius the Great (ca. 290–348) was an early Christian monk, and is considered the founder of *cenobitic* monasticism—a form of monasticism that stresses the importance of sharing a common community life within a monastery. (In contrast to *eremitic* monasticism, in which monks live a mostly solitary life.) He established several monasteries in the deserts of Upper Egypt.¹

Abba Pachomius was the first monastic leader to establish a formal rule of life for his monasteries.

¹*In the regions surrounding modern-day Qena, Egypt.*

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Adapted from the *Anthologion*, Saint Ignatius Orthodox Press
Edited by Reader John Dykstra
Project Oversight by David DeJonge

ISBN 979-8-9865301-6-1

Third Printing, 2024
Printed in China

This included his prayer rule, which he expected his monks to pray each day. According to tradition, this short prayer rule was revealed to him by an angel. Abba Pachomius himself maintained it faithfully throughout his life, reciting it at every hour of the day and night. As many of his monks were illiterate, the prayer rule is simple and easy to memorize, having the Jesus Prayer at its heart, together with other common prayers. It is believed that Saint Pachomius started the practice of using a prayer rope with his prayer rule, as an aid to keeping track of recitations without needing to focus on counting.

In our modern world, literacy is high, and many different prayer books are available. Nevertheless, it is profitable to know a simple prayer rule like Saint Pachomius', because it can be easily recalled from memory and prayerfully recited while commuting, during work, in any place or at any time of day.

THE OFFICE OF THE TWELVE PSALMS

LIKE the Rule of Saint Pachomius, this prayer service developed out of the early Christian monastic tradition, in which the entire Book of Psalms was read in a structured fashion every single day.

Over time, other hymns and prayers were added to these daily Psalm readings to enrich the prayers. At the same time, the simpler Twelve Psalms service developed as a substitute for the daily services of Matins, Vespers, and the Hours.

The Twelve Psalms were prayed especially in small monasteries, or *sketes*, in which the many books required for full liturgical worship services were not available, or in which the monks did not have the skill or ability to perform them. (Note that the Twelve Psalms were never meant to replace a person's normal personal prayer rule, but to compliment it, in the same way that church services compliment our personal prayers.)

In today's world, we see how easily our access to the Church's divine services can be cut off, whether due to pandemic, civil unrest, or violence. God forbid, but we cannot take for granted that we will always be able to attend Church when we desire it. To remain in the life of the Church, we must take on the responsibility of prayer ourselves. In such circumstances, we can look to our spiritual ancestors in the ancient deserts, who became like angels in their simple lives of constant prayer.

Whether prevented from attending Church due to illness, travel, or other circumstances, or if one simply desires to observe the Church's cycle of prayer in an uncomplicated way, the time-tested prayers of the Twelve Psalms have led countless souls on the road to salvation.

THE 153 TEXTS ON PRAYER

THESSE texts were written by Evagrius Ponticus, known as “the Solitary” (ca. 345–399). He was born into a Christian family in Heraclea Pontica.² Evagrius was educated by the best minds of his day, studying under the great fathers of the Church, Saints Basil the Great and Gregory of Nazianzus.

Evagrius rose through the minor orders of the clergy—being tonsured a reader, then being elevated to subdeacon. He was later promoted to the major order of deacon, and then to archdeacon. At the age of 36, he was present at the Second Ecumenical Council in Constantinople in the year 381.

Even as a member of the clergy, Evagrius lived a very worldly life, full of vanity and sinful relationships with married women. By God's mercy, he received a terrifying vision that shook him to his core,

²Modern-day Karadeniz Ereğli, Türkiye.

and he was warned by an angel to flee to Jerusalem.

He attached himself to a monastery near the Holy City, but even there he could not shake off his pride and vanity. After being struck with a serious illness, he finally confessed his sins and entered the monastic life in repentance. He spent a few years in Jerusalem, and then departed to the desert monasteries of Upper Egypt,³ where he studied the spiritual life under the guidance of the famous Desert Fathers.

Under the guidance of Saints Macarius the Great and Macarius of Alexandria, Evagrius spent fourteen years in extreme asceticism and repentance for his sins. He reposed in the year 399, leaving behind stories of his life written by others who knew him, as well as his own writings, which have left a lasting impression on Eastern Christian spirituality.

Among his wise words that have passed down to us are his *153 Texts On Prayer*, which are found in the collection of ascetic writings known as the *Philokalia*. While his *153 Texts* were written to an unnamed monk, these bite-sized pieces of deep spiritual wisdom based on his experiences of repentance are edifying to all those who are seeking to truly pray and live a life of holiness. ✠

³In the regions surrounding modern-day Luxor, Egypt.



THE RULE OF SAINT PACHOMIUS

THROUGH the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

Glory to you, our God, glory to you.

O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, present everywhere, filling all things, Treasury of blessings and Giver of life, come and dwell in us, cleanse us from every stain, and, O Good One, save our souls.

THE TRISAGION PRAYERS

HOLY God, Holy Mighty, Holy Immortal, have mercy on us. (3)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

All-Holy Trinity, have mercy on us. Lord, forgive our sins. Master, pardon our iniquities. Holy One, visit and heal our infirmities for your Name's sake.

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Our Father in heaven, may your Name be hal- lowed, your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one.

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us. Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (12)

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Come, let us worship and fall down before the King, our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, the King, our God.

Come, let us worship and fall down before him, Christ the King and our God.

PSALM 50

HAVE mercy on me, O God, in your great mercy; according to the fullness of your compassion, blot out my offense.

Wash me thoroughly from my wickedness, and cleanse me from my sin.

For I acknowledge my wickedness, and my sin is ever before me.

Against you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight,

That you may be justified in your words, and prevail when you are judged.

For behold, in wickedness I was conceived, and in sin my mother bore me.

For behold, you have loved truth: you have shown me the hidden and secret things of your wisdom.

You will sprinkle me with hyssop, and I shall be cleansed; you will wash me, and I shall be made whiter than snow.

You will make me hear of joy and gladness; the bones which have been humbled will rejoice.

Turn away your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities.

Create a clean heart in me, O God, and renew a right Spirit within me.

Do not cast me out from your presence, and do not take your Holy Spirit from me.

Give me back the joy of your salvation, and establish me with a sovereign Spirit.

I will teach transgressors your ways, and sinners will turn to you again.

O God, the God of my salvation, deliver me from bloodshed, and my tongue will rejoice at your righteousness.

O Lord, you will open my lips, and my mouth will declare your praise.

For if you had wanted a sacrifice, I would have given it; you will not take pleasure in burnt offerings.

A sacrifice to God is a broken spirit; a broken and a humbled heart God will not despise.

Do good to Zion, O Lord, in your good pleasure, and let the walls of Jerusalem be rebuilt.

Then you will be well-pleased with a sacrifice of righteousness, oblation and whole burnt offerings.

Then they will offer calves upon your altar.

THE CREED

I BELIEVE in one God, Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, of all things visible and invisible.

And in one Lord Jesus Christ, the Only-begotten Son of God, begotten from the Father before all ages. Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, consubstantial with the Father; through him all things were made; for our sake and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate from the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary and became man; he was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate, and suffered and was buried; he rose again on the third day, in accordance with the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father; he is coming again in glory to judge the living and the dead; and his Kingdom will have no end.

And in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of life, who proceeds from the Father, who together with the Father and the Son is worshiped and together glorified; who spoke through the Prophets. In one, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church; I confess one

Baptism for the forgiveness of sins. I await the Resurrection of the dead and the life of the age to come. Amen.

THE JESUS PRAYER

O LORD, Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner. (100)

THE DISMISSAL

IT is truly right to call you blessed, who gave birth to God, ever-blessed and most pure and the Mother of our God. Greater in honor than the Cherubim and beyond compare more glorious than the Seraphim, without corruption you gave birth to God the Word; truly the Mother of God, we magnify you.

Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, both now and forever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

Lord, have mercy. (3)

Through the prayers of our holy fathers, O Lord Jesus Christ, our God, have mercy on us. Amen. ✠



THE OFFICE OF THE TWELVE PSALMS

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Now continue with the appointed Stases (sections) according to the chart on the next page.