



Orthodox Heritage

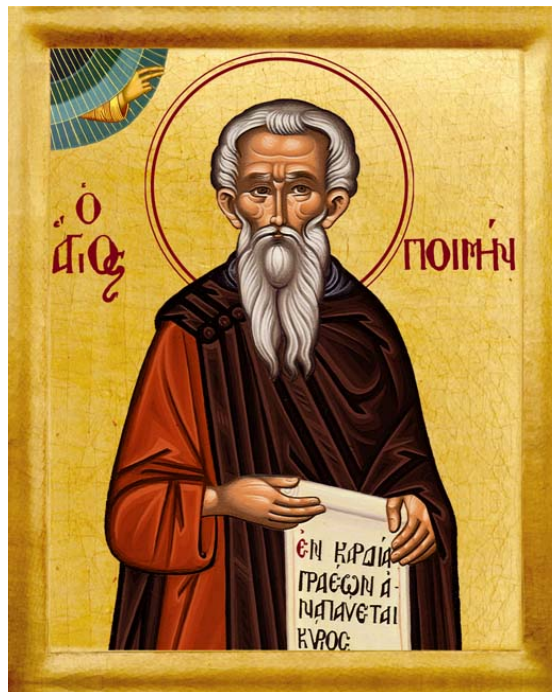


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Life of Our Holy Father, St. Poimen The Great

340-450 AD



The Monk Poimen the Great (Abba Poimen) was born in about the year 340 in Egypt. With his two brothers, Anubios and Paisios, he went into one of the Egyptian monasteries, and all three accepted monastic tonsure. The brothers were such strict ascetics that when their mother came to the monastery to see her children, they did not come out to her from their cells. The mother stood there for a long time and wept. Then the Monk Poimen said to her through the closed door of the cell: "If thou bearest with the temporal parting from us now, then in the future life wilt thou see us, since we do hope upon God the Lover-of-Mankind!" The mother was humbled and returned home.

Fame about the deeds and virtues of the Monk Poimen spread throughout all the land. One time the governor of the district wanted to see him. The Monk Poimen, shunning fame, reasoned thus: "If dignitaries begin coming to me with respect, then also many of the people will start coming to me and disturb my quiet, and I shalt be deprived of the grace of humility, which I have found only with the help of God." And so he relayed a refusal to the messenger. For many of the monks, the Monk Poimen was a spiritual guide and instructor. And they wrote down his answers to serve to the edification of others besides themselves. A certain monk asked: "Ought one to veil over with silence the sin of a transgressing brother, if perchance one see him?" The elder answered: "If we reproach the sins of brothers, then God will reproach our sins, and if thou seest a brother sinning, believe not thine eyes and know, that thine own sin is like a wood-beam, but the sin of thy brother is like a wood-splinter, and then thou wilt not come into distress and temptation." Another monk turned to the saint, saying: "I have grievously sinned and I want to spend three years at repentance. Is such a length of time sufficient?" The elder answered: "That is a long time." The monk continued to ask how long a period of repentance did the saint reckon necessary for him -- a year or forty days? The elder answered: "I think that if a man repenteth from the depths of his heart and posits a firm intent to return no more to the sin, then God would accept also a three-day repentance." To the question, as to how to be rid of persistent evil thoughts, the saint answered: "If a man has on one side of him fire, and on the other side a vessel with water, then if he starts burning from the fire, he takes water from the vessel and extinguishes the fire. Like to this are the evil thoughts, suggested by the enemy of our salvation, which like a spark can enkindle sinful desires within man. It is necessary to put out these sparks with the water, which is prayer and the yearning of the soul for God."

The Monk Poimen was strict at fasting and did not partake of food for the space of a week or more. But others he advised to eat every day, only but without eating one's fill. For a certain monk, permitting himself to partake of food only on the seventh day but being angry with a brother, the saint said: "Thou wouldst learn to fast over six days, yet cannot abstain from anger for even a single day." To the question, which is better -- to speak or be silent, the elder said: "Whoso doth speak on account of God, doeth well, and whoso is silent on account of God -- that one doth act well." And moreover: "It may be, that a man seems to be silent, but if his heart doth judge others, then always is he speaking. But there are also those, who all the day long speak with their tongue, but within themselves they do keep silence, since they judge no one."

The saint said: "For a man it is necessary to observe three primary rules: to fear God, to pray often and to do good for people." "Malice in turn never wipes out malice. If someone doeth thee bad, do them good, and thine good will conquer

their bad." One time, when the monk with his students arrived at an Egyptian wilderness-monastery (since he had the habit to go about from place to place, so as to shun glory from men), it became known to him, that the elder living there was annoyed at his arrival and also was jealous of him. In order to overcome the malice of the hermit, the saint set off to him with his brethren, taking along with them food as a present. The elder refused to come out to them. Thereupon the Monk Poimen said: "We shall not depart from here, until we are granted to see and pay respect to the holy elder," -- and he remained standing in the bright heat at the door of the cell. Seeing such perseverance and lack of malice on the part of the Monk Poimen, the elder received him graciously and said: "It is right what I have heard about you, but I see in you the good deeds and an hundred times even more so." Thus did the Monk Poimen know how to extinguish malice and provide good example to others. He possessed such great humility, that often with a sigh he said: "I shalt be cast down to that place, whither was cast down Satan!"

One time there came to the saint a monk from afar, to get his guidance. He began to speak about sublime matters difficult to grasp. The saint turned away from him and was silent. To the bewildered monk they explained, that the saint did not like to speak about lofty matters. Then the monk began to ask him about the struggle with passions of soul. The saint turned to him with a joyful face: "Here now thou well hath spoken, and I must speak for it needs answer," -- and for a long while he provided instruction, as to how one ought to struggle with the passions and conquer them.

The Monk Poimen died at age 110, in about the year 450. Soon after his death he was acknowledged as a saint pleasing to God and received the title "the Great" -- as a sign of his great humility, modesty, uprightness, and self-denying service to God.



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