2022-08-12: St Moses the Strong

Objective:

The Transformative Power of Repentance

Key Verse:

"Return to me, and I will return to you" (Malachi 3:7)

Visual Aid:

Attached to this page.

Introduction:

- This week, we will study the life and stories of one of the great desert fathers - our father the Strong Abba Moses (□□ ⲁ□□□ □□□□ □□□□)
- I hope that when we learn the stories of St Moses, we will take him for ourselves as an intercessor and remember him in all of our prayers, and follow his example
- St Moses is widely known in the whole world as a model of repentance - even in Egypt they call him "Anba Moussa el Aswad" - Moses the Black. And you might find him called that in English sometimes... yes, he was dark in skin. But the name refers to the darkness of his life. His sinful life which was missing the light of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- So let's take some stories from his life, including some miracles, and see what we can learn from him

Stories of Abba Moses:

- His Early Life and Baptism
  - He was the slave of a high government official. The official could not tolerate Moses' dishonesty and violence, so he drove him out.
  - Moses became the head of 70 leaders of robbers in the wilderness of Egypt. He was strong and fierce and committed all kinds of sins – any sin that you can think of.
  - He used to pray to the sun and say "If you are god let me know and You, the God whom I do not know, lead me to You"
  - One day, he heard a voice saying to him "the monks of the wilderness of Scetis know the real God. Go to them and they will inform you." He went to Scetis and met with Abba Isidore who took him to Abba Macarius the Great who taught him about the Lord Jesus Christ, the Incarnation, the Redemption.

    - Moses accepted Christ, repented and confessed publicly all the sins he had ever committed, before being baptized. Abba Macarius saw a tablet that was all black and each time Moses would confess a sin, the angel would erase it from the tablet until it was white
- The Story of the Robbers
    - St Moses entered his cell and found four robbers raiding it.
    - He overpowered them, tied them all together and lifted them over his shoulder like a bag of sand. He brought them to the church and asked St Macarius what he should do? He was still new to being a Christian and he didn't know how he could deal with them without being violent.
    - St Macarius told him "yes let them take whatever they want! And set them free!"
        - (St. Macarius was known for another story when he found his cell being robbed and he let them finish robbing it. Then when they were done, he went in and saw that they left a jar of olives. So he ran outside and yelled to them that they forgot something).
    - When the thieves knew that St Moses was a former thief who had repented, they repented too.

- Angels and Demons
    - St Moses multiplied his disciplines and especially in eating and in prayers.
    - But the less he ate and the more he prayed, the more he was consumed by dreams.
    - He couldn't stand to be in his cell anymore. But Abba Isidore advised him to return to his cell. St Moses refused.
    - So Abba Isidore took him to the roof of his cell and they looked over one side and saw many devils trying to get into the cell. Then they looked over the other side and saw innumerable angels defending the cell. He went back to his cell without fear.

- Buckets of Water
    - St Moses would go in the middle of the night to the cells of the elder monks and take their water pitchers and fill them with water without their knowledge. They lived far from one another and the cells were 2-5 miles away from the water

- Welcoming to all Visitors
    - Abba Moses was very welcoming to all visitors and received them with joy.
    - One time a visitor came to the monastery and met with Abba Arsenius. And Abba Arsenius had taken a vow of silence. So the visitor left his cell very annoyed and offended that he received a cold welcome. Then he asked to see Abba Moses and Abba Moses rejoiced and received him and made him food.
    - Another time, there was a period of fasting in Scetis when everyone was to abstain from food. Some visitors came from Cairo to see Abba Moses. When he saw them, he started to prepare a lot of food for them. The monks around him saw the smoke coming from his cell and accused him of breaking the fast to the priests. But the priests knew his habits, so they said in front of the whole congregation of monks "O Abba Moses truly you have sacrificed the commandment of the people to fulfill the commandment of Christ"

- Bag of Sand
  - Once the Fathers of the Scetis were holding a council to reprimand a monk who had committed a fault. St. Moses was invited, but he refused to attend. The priest went to him, and said, Come, for the people are expecting you.
  - St. Moses arose, took a basket filled with sand that had a hole in the bottom of it, carried it on his shoulder and started walking towards the council. When the monks saw him coming with the bag of sand, with sand pouring out of the hole, they asked him the reason of his behavior.
  - He said to them, The sand you see running from the bag represents my sins which are always following me, and yet, today I am coming to judge the grain of sand of my brother?
  - When they heard this, they left the council and every monk went to his own cell, as none could judge that monk.

- Visitor for Abba Moses
  - One day a visitor was coming to the monastery and he said to Abba Moses “I am here to see Abba Moses the Black – do you know where I can find him?” Abba Moses replied “What would you want with him? He’s a sinner and nothing he can say is of any value” – the man kept walking to the monastery and asked the other monks in shock “Is it true what I heard about Abba Moses?” They said “What did the guy look like who told you that?” and he told them “Very big and strong and dark skinned” and they told him “that was Abba Moses”

- Sickness and Healing
  - One day the devil envied him and struck him with sores on his foot. He was unable to move. When he knew it was a temptation from the devil, he increased in asceticism and worship until his body was like burnt wood.
  - God saw his patience and toil and relieved him from his pain and he was healed.

- Ordination as Priest
  - He was elected to be ordained a priest.
  - He went in front of the Patriarch who decided to test him. The patriarch told the clergy to cast him out and reviled him saying “You think you are worthy of the priesthood, you who are black with sin?” and Abba Moses turned around and left saying to himself “It is good what they have done to you, O black one”
  - When the Patriarch saw his humility, he called Abba Moses back and ordained him to priesthood and said to him “Now you have become entirely white”

- His Martyrdom
  - In 370 AD, St Moses went with some Desert Fathers went to visit St Macarius.
  - St Macarius said “My brethren, I see one of you worthy of the crown of martyrdom and he is going to shed his blood in the wilderness” St. Moses said “Probably me, since the Lord said that all who take by the sword shall perish with the sword”
  - When the Barbarians raided Scetis, Abba Moses was sitting with seven of his disciples. He told them to flee and that he would stay behind. Six of them stood behind and the Barbarians came and killed them all. The one monk who was hiding

saw seven crowns coming down and crowning them

- Some Sayings of Abba Moses
  - “Humility of heart precedes all virtues, and the desire of the belly is the source of all passions. Pride is the basis of all vices and love is the origin of all goodness.”
  - “Four virtues aid the young monk: Continuous meditation on the word of God, watchfulness, fervent prayer, and considering himself as nothing.”

Body:

- The power of repentance is TRANSFORMATION
  - Abba Moses who was head of 70 heads of robbers, became head of over 500 monks
  - Abba Moses who took many lives in murder, gave his life for Christ
  - Abba Moses who used to daily eat a whole lamb, ate ten ounces of dry bread
  - Abba Moses who hated all humankind, came to love everybody
  - Abba Moses who was a giant in stature, became humble in spirit
  - Abba Moses who committed every sin, we call him Saint and Abba

- Transformation Comes from Repentance
  - Transformation comes from the renewing of the mind, as we read in St Paul's epistle to the Romans: “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2)
  - Renewing of the mind is the definition of Repentance
    - Repentance comes from the Greek "Metanoia" which means "Change of Mind"
  - “Repent therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (Acts 3:19)

Application:

- It is never too late to repent of a sin and confess it
- Repentance is not just a mental action or a thought or a decision - it is reflected in actions
- Repentance goes hand-in-hand with the Sacrament of Eucharist

Contemplation:

Sometimes the thing that stops us from sitting in confession is the very thing that we should be repenting of and confessing about! Lord, give us the strength of Abba Moses who overcame the demons that were enslaving him. Give us the courage of Abba Moses who left behind his old life and his past self, and was reborn and consecrated to You. Give us the humility of Abba Moses who recognized and admitted his weaknesses and his sins. Give us the patience of Abba Moses who even before his repentance, did not cease to seek You. Give us the asceticism of Abba Moses who despite his size and his strength, did not focus on the physical needs as much as the spiritual. Let us be like Abba Moses, Lord, we who are black with sin, who are slaves of sin, who are lacking in our repentance. Let us be light in the world of darkness as Your Saint, Abba Moses was. Through the prayers of St Mary and St Abba Moses the Strong and St Rebekah, grant this to us, O Lord, and more. Amen.

Resources:

- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBrZk_YPzHA - Fr Luke Maher on Abba Moses the Strong
- https://abbey.suscopts.org/about-us/saint-moses-the-strong/
- Synxarion: Paone 24 (July 1)
- Encyclopedia of the Saints and Fathers of the Church - Volume 3 - Fr Tadros Yacoub Malaty
- The Sayings of the Desert Fathers (The Alphabetical Collection)

Revision #4
Created 2022-07-23 02:00:06 UTC by Morcous Wahba
Updated 2022-08-01 20:32:23 UTC by Morcous Wahba