

Monasticism Month

St. John the Short

St. John Kolobos, commonly referred to as St. John the Short, was a prominent desert father known for his obedience and wisdom. He was born in 339 AD to a poor but holy family and desired the monastic life from his early childhood years. When he was eighteen, he left his hometown and went to the wilderness of Skete, where he was a disciple of Aba Pemouah (also the teacher of St. Pishoy the Perfect Man). At first, Aba Pemouah was reluctant to accept St. John into the harsh monastic life. However, an angel appeared to Aba Pemouah asking him to welcome John as a monk. Thus, St. John started his life of monasticism.

The first task assigned to St. John as a monk was to plant a walking stick in the ground and water it every single day. Although this task may seem mundane and the stick was twelve miles away in each direction, St. John continued to water the walking stick every single day. After three years of doing so without complaint, the stick miraculously budded and produced fruit. This story displays the magnitude of St. John's obedience and that being obedient results in good fruit in a spiritual sense.

St. John the Short also emphasized the consecration of the mind—that is, focusing on only spiritual matters rather than worldly matters. Aba Pemouah taught St. John the importance of quiet when consecrating the mind, saying, “The longer quietness prevails, the weaker the pains of lusts become, and the healthier the mind becomes until it reaches peace.” There are many stories in which St. John spent days upon days discussing and contemplating spiritual matters, completely losing track of time.

In 374 AD, Aba Pemouah departed, and St. John took on the role of a Teacher to many of the monks in the wilderness. These monks saw the depth of virtues in St. John and desired to learn from him. St. John instructed them saying, “The holy ones are like a garden of trees bearing different fruits but irrigated by the same water. The activity of one holy one is different from that of another, but there is one spirit at work in them all.” Thus, he taught the monks that all spiritual fruits and virtues come from the gift of the Holy Spirit working in all of them.

Let us strive to be like St. John the Short—obedient, constantly focused on spiritual matters, and encouraged by the gift of the Holy Spirit. May his prayers be with us always.

Sources:

- [Coptic Synaxarium](#)
- Sayings of the Desert Fathers