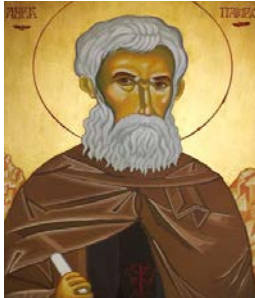


Monasticism Month

St. Pambo of Nitria

This week we remember the holy and ascetic life of St. Pambo of Nitria, whose feast is celebrated on the 11th of Epep. He was one of the most beloved Desert Fathers of Egypt and a powerful example of humility, silence, and deep spiritual discipline. St. Pambo lived in the Nitrian desert and followed the monastic way with great zeal. From the beginning of his life as a monk, a single verse from the Psalms pierced his heart: *“I said, I will guard my ways, that I may not sin with my tongue”* ([Psalm 39:1](#)). This one verse became the foundation of his spiritual life. He spent years meditating on it and striving to fulfill it. He would often remain silent for long periods and only spoke when his words were needed, and was full of grace. Whenever someone asked him a question, he would respond only after prayer and careful thought, often saying, “I



must think first, and perhaps I can, in time, give an answer, with God’s help.” For St. Pambo, the tongue was not to be used lightly—it was to be guarded with the same watchfulness that one gives to the heart.

He became known for his dedication to labor and simplicity. He worked every day, usually weaving mats and baskets from palm leaves, and he lived only on what his own hands earned. He wore cast-off clothing, fasted regularly, and practiced deep self-denial. He did not seek comfort or recognition. Instead, he lived as quietly and humbly as possible, always giving his heart fully to God. Like the other hermits around him, St. Pambo practiced long hours of prayer and embraced hardship with joy. His cell was not a place of isolation, but a holy sanctuary where he continually encountered the presence of God.

One of the most famous moments in the life of St. Pambo involves the visit of St. Melania the Elder, a wealthy and noble Roman woman who had devoted her life to Christ. When she arrived in Egypt, she was moved by the holiness of the desert fathers and wished to offer support to their communities. After hearing of the sanctity of St. Pambo, she was eager to meet him and was brought to him by the elder Isidore. She carried with her a basket that contained three hundred pounds of stamped silver coins—an enormous sum by any standard. She approached St. Pambo while he was weaving palm leaves and asked him to accept the money for the needs of the monks.

Without looking up from his work, St. Pambo simply said, “God gives you your reward,” and continued weaving. He then turned to his steward, whose name was Origen and instructed him to distribute the silver among the brethren who lived on the Island and in Libya, since these communities were poor and in need. However, he ordered that none of it be given to the monks in Egypt, for they had what was sufficient for their needs. St. Melania stood silently, waiting for some further acknowledgment or expression of gratitude, but none came. She then said to him, “Master, do you know how much money is in this basket? There are three hundred pounds of

silver!” At this, St. Pambo calmly responded, still without lifting his gaze, “He who weighed the mountains in a balance knows how much the weight of your silver is. If you had given the money to me, you would have done well to inform me of its weight. But since you have given it to God, who did not despise the two mites of the widow, what need have you to tell Him? Hold your peace.” This moment reveals the depth of St. Pambo’s humility. He was not impressed by earthly wealth, no matter how generously given. His eyes were always fixed on the eternal kingdom, and he measured all things by their spiritual worth.

St. Pambo lived his whole life in the desert, quietly forming a generation of holy men who would become pillars of the early Church. Among his disciples were Discorus, who later became Bishop of Hermopolis, as well as Ammonius, Eusebius, Euthymius, and Origen—each of whom followed in the same path of asceticism, humility, and prayer. These men, trained by St. Pambo’s example, would go on to influence both Egyptian and broader Christian monasticism for centuries to come.

When the time of his departure approached, there was no sign of illness or warning. As he completed sewing a mat, St. Pambo sent for St. Melania and handed the mat to her, saying, “Take this mat from my hands so that you may keep me in remembrance, for I have nothing else whatever to leave you.” He then peacefully reposed, right there in his cell, still engaged in the work he had offered to God for decades. He was seventy years old at the time of his passing. His death was not marked by suffering, but by peace and quietness, just as he had lived. It is said that his face shone with serenity, as if reflecting the eternal light of Christ that had always dwelt in him.

The life of St. Pambo is a precious gift to the Church, especially to the Coptic faithful who continue to honor the legacy of the Desert Fathers. His sayings and stories are not only preserved in the Synaxarion but also treasured in the *Sayings of the Desert Fathers*. These brief sayings continue to offer spiritual medicine, drawing people away from the distractions of the world and into a deeper relationship with God. St. Pambo reminds us that holiness is not found in many words, public deeds, or outward honor, but in silence, humility, honest labor, and a heart that is always in the presence of God.

May we learn from his life to watch our tongues, to live simply, to give freely, and to seek nothing but Christ Himself. And may the prayers of St. Pambo of Nitria be with us all. Amen.

Sources:

- The Sayings of the Desert Fathers
- English Standard Version Bible:
<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Psalm+39&version=ESV>
- The Paradise of the Holy Fathers