



THE LIFE OF THE GREAT 'SAINT BAKHOMIOS' FATHER OF COMMUNITY

FIRSTLY: BIOGRAPHY OF HIS LIFE

1. His Childhood

Saint Bakhomios was born year 292 AD in a village in Upper Egypt. It's name at that time was **Kenoboskion** (Chenoboskion) and is now in an area called "**Qasr EL-Sayad**" in the governate of Qena in Upper Egypt. It is claimed that the word Kenoboskion in Greek means a center of monasticism, or a place where a big number of cells for monks are. This might mean that this name was given to it after St. Bakhomios established his Monasteries.

He was born from two pagan parents. During his time, the paganism in Egypt reached the lowest level of manners and behavior; to the extent that the pagan religious leaders practiced all sorts of sexual immorality and accordingly, it became a green light for the people to do the same. This without mentioning the other different bad habits and addictions.

His parents nourished him with sciences, philosophy and also the principles of pagan worships. His name in the origin Coptic is Bakhoum which means 'an eagle' and is written in Greek as 'Bakhomios'. St. Bakhomios was interested in research and study, he specialised himself in studying the old religions of Egypt, starting from the worship of the Pharaohs to the religions of the Greek and Romans who occupied Egypt in different eras.

While St. Bakhomios had grown up in this terrible environment in his young age, he was a very calm, descent and humble person and he didn't like the terrible actions of lawlessness, which was surrounding him and he never shared in them. His study in the old religions made him not convinced for any of them and he was eagerly searching for the truth.

Spiritual Thought:

God is a lover of mankind and is fair to reveal Himself for everyone. He put inside us the conscience which acts like a natural law to guide our way to distinguish between the good and evil. He put inside us the desire to the good, but it gets back to everyone of us if he/she listens to the voice of his/her conscience or puts it off.

2. Some Incidents In His Early Years

When he was young, his parents came to him with some wine from their offering to the idols, he didn't like to drink it but as they forced him, he vomited it out from his mouth on the spot. Another time his parents took him with them to offer worship to the idols where at that time was a big sea animal contained in a net around the bank of the river. When the animal looked at St. Bakhomios, it became agitated and broke the net and fled inside the river. The priest of the idols seeing this became furious and cried out shouting, "this is an enemy to our gods, cast him away from here". This matter disturbed his parents who kept questioning him saying, "why are the gods angry with you?" but he could not give them any answer as he was still searching for the truth.

Another incident happened where his father gave him some cooked meat and food to deliver to the laborers in their field, and the devils* appeared to him like a group of dogs trying to attack him. He lifted his eyes up to the sky saying, "Oh God whom I do not know yet save me!" and they all disappeared. By the time he arrived at the field delivering the food for the laborers, it became dark so he preferred to sleep in that place till the morning. While he was sleeping, a daughter of one of the laborers who was so beautiful came to him and wanted to commit sin with him, but he jumped up quickly refusing this strongly and told her, "am I a dog to sleep with a sister, how could I commit such a defilement?" but she answered him back saying that, "everyone does the same thing". St. Bakhomios hearing this jumped and ran quickly returning home in the dark of the night.

* The devil with his long experience with mankind, when he notices such behavior from a person, he expects that he/she will be a good person rejecting his evil ways. So he starts attacking and fighting him/her even if he/she does not become Christian yet.

3. Bakhomios' Youth

When he grew close to twenty in year 312 AD, Constantine the great the first Christian Roman Emperor received messages that king Maximanous Daya of Persia is planning a war against him. King Constantine sent an imperial decree to gather all the men from the age of 20 – 25 to form a strong army for the war. St. Bakhomios was taken among the troops and while they have been travelling north, they passed by a village called "Latoplice" which now is a city called "Esna". They arrived there in exhaustion and tiredness, the simple Christian peasants went out of their homes carrying great amount of food and drink for them. This act astounded St. Bakhomios and he questioned himself saying, "why would these people who hadn't seen us before do this hospitality for us while we are an army of soldiers who could attack their homes and trouble them?" The answer was given to him that because they are Christians and Christ is their God, He teaches them to love and serve everyone, even their enemies. This thing touched St. Bakhomios' heart and he felt a great motivation inside him to investigate about this new

religion which he hadn't heard before. He spent most of this night with those simple farmers asking them about Christianity, comparing what they told him to what he studied about paganism and all the other religions being practiced in Egypt.

He felt in his heart that this is the true religion and he withdrew aside, lifting his hands up in prayer saying, "O my Lord and God Jesus Christ whom I don't know yet but I feel in my heart that You are the true God. If You get me back safe from the war, I will administer to You all my life".

4. His Christianity

A short time after this, God helped the Christian king Constantine to defeat his enemies and he sent a decree releasing all the recruited soldiers and officers to go back home.

St. Bakhomios did not go back to his home but he went to a village called "**Shenofeskia**" or "senset" and there he asked about a Church, met with a priest and explained to him his life story and desire to be a Christian. The priest accepted him after testing his real heartfelt desire and instructed him with the details of Christianity. St. Bakhomios stayed in the old desolate temple for the pagan idol "serabis" which was close to the Church. St. Bakhomios put all his heart in studying Christianity and grew up more and more in his faith, so the priest presented him to bishop Serabion who Baptised him. In the night of his Baptism, he had a vision as if he was standing in the open early in the morning, his right hand is stretched out and the dew gathered on his hand. It then turned to be a big amount of honey dropping on the ground and forming a big area full of honey. He heard a voice saying to him, "heed what is happening as you will understand it's meaning later". This took place year 313 AD.

As he started having Holy Communion, he felt his heart burning with the love of Christ and found what he was seeking for all his life. He decided not to go back to see his parents but to stay in the same place where there was a little garden with some plants and palm trees. He spent all his time in the Church serving and assisting the priest and looking after this little desolate garden, using it's fruits to eat and also to help the poor and needy in the surrounding area.

He dedicated himself for serving the poor, the sick and those who are in need by any way, while in the same time watering his heart with the Word of life from our Lord Jesus Christ.

Spiritual Thought:

"The Lord grants you according to your heartfelt desire and fulfills your purpose, we will rejoice in Your Salvation and in the Name of our God we will set up our banners" (Psalm 20:4, 5)

St. Bakhomios desired the truth with his heart and the Lord opened the way to him and helped him to know Him and be a member of His Holy Body.

Do not put excuses to yourself that you are away from God because of circumstances or the environment around you; if you seek the true way with your heart, God will help you to find Him.

5. Saint Bakhomios' Spiritual Growth

He grew up more and more in the love of our God and Savior Jesus Christ, serving His Church and not missing out on having the blessing of a “cup of cold water” presented in the Lord’s Name. The area where he stayed at that time was full of poor people; added to it, there was a severe sickness which hit many of them and stopped their capability for work. St. Bakhomios used to look after their needs by collecting firewood and carrying it to their homes as well as offering them as much as he could from food and drink. St. Bakhomios continued doing this for three years.

He felt that the love of Christ is more inflaming inside him, so much that he wanted to devote himself fully for the Lord. He felt in his heart the desire to spare the time used in serving the people, to be dedicated fully in enjoying the love of the Lord in quietness and calmness.

He spoke with his confession father about this who said to him, “this is the way of monastic life in which I cannot help you. But I know that at the borders of our city towards the desert, there lives an ascetic anachorite in a cave, his name is father Palamon. I advise you to go to him and he can guide you in this way.” Hearing this, St. Bakhomios was filled with joy and started arranging for someone to take his service for the Church and the needy people.

6. His Monastic Life

After arranging everything early in one of the mornings, St. Bakhomios took some bread and water and started walking towards the mountain, asking the Lord to lead his way to where father Palamon was staying. He arrived at the cave of the old monk at sunset while knocking. St. Palamon came out to him questioning him about what he wanted. St. Bakhomios said, “I’m seeking your fatherhood to accept me as a son to you in our Lord Jesus Christ to teach me the monastic way”. St. Palamon answered, “you seem from a rich origin and our life here is a very hard and tough life, you might not be able to cope in it. Most of our life is fasting, our food is only the basics which is enough for us to live; we watch long hours in prayers and reading the Word of God, working with our hands making baskets to be sold for our needs while the rest is given to the poor. We are here in real confrontation to the devil face to face, who sets his tough fights against us and added to many other difficulties which we also face. I advise you to go back to where you came from and keep serving the Lord in His Church which is a good thing you were doing.”

Saint Bakhomios answered him, “father I came here with my full hearty desire to be a monk, I trust in my Lord Jesus Christ firstly and in your prayers and support secondly that I will be fully obedient to all your directions, with the grace of our God I will be able to achieve this way.” Saint Palamon answered, “If this is the case, go back and taste it

yourself to see if you can cope in this way gradually according to what I explained to you and if you feel yourself fit for it, come back to me”. St. Bakhomios said, “I came with a steadfast heart as I feel that this is my real desire and I already have delivered the services which I was doing to some other deacons to do them, I am sure through my Lord that this is the way I want and with your prayers, I will go well in it and you will be pleased with me. Please my father do not reject me as the Lord said, “He who comes to Me I will not cast out”.

When St. Palamon found his steadfastness, he opened the door for him, kissed him and accepted him in and started teaching him the principles of monastic life.

St. Bakhomios grew very quick with the guidance of St. Palamon and his total obedience to his spiritual father helped him to grow more and more. He put to himself a rule that he will never do anything before asking his spiritual father which made St. Palamon happy and confident that he will be a pure monk for the Lord. Their life was grounded on a very strong ascetic way from eating very simple food (mostly bread and some water with salt and some vegetables from the ground). They used to watch long hours in prayer, praises and reading. Whenever they felt sleepy; they used to go out with baskets carrying the sand from place to place until they would feel awake and continue their prayers. They used to work by weaving baskets and sometimes they used to stay up till the morning working, praying and reading as well as having a bit of rest and continuing again.

An example for their high asceticism is shown on the feast of the Resurrection, St. Palamon asked him to prepare something early as it is a great feast. Accidentally the oil was poured a bit much while preparing and when St. Palamon saw it, he wept bitterly saying, “my Lord was Crucified for me yesterday and now I am comforting myself with eating food with this oil”. St. Bakhomios apologized that he didn’t mean it and that it was accidentally poured from his hand; but this shows you how they were very strict in their fastings and careful in their asceticism.

In the same way, St. Palamon nourished St. Bakhomios by growing up with a real monastic life accepted before the Lord as an aroma of pure incense.

Spiritual Thought:

“Because I have not obeyed the voice of my guiders nor inclined my ear to those who instructed me; I was on the verge of total ruin, in the midst of the assembly and congregation” (Proverbs 5:13, 14)

In spiritual life, the most guaranteed way is obeying your confession father, who guides you in Christ and leads your step of growing until you achieve Heaven.

7. Some Incidents With Saint Palamon

- (i) St. Palamon used to advise St. Bakhomios to go to the cemetery and watch the tombs of the dead people, in order to remember that this will be our end and that we shouldn’t care much for the body, as it will end up as dust one day. Once they

went together to the cemetery and they saw some people weeping and wailing for the dead person. Then St. Palamon said, “look my son Bakhomios how they are bitterly weeping for a person who died and became dust; how much do we need to weep for our souls which will never die, but will either enjoy Heavenly life through her good deeds, or suffer in hell through her bad deeds.

- (ii) Once while they were working in winter time and burning some fire wood because of the cold; while continuously praying during their work, one of the brothers living nearby came to them. As St. Palamon received him, this brother spoke in a voice full of pride saying, “if you have confidence in yourselves that you are going straight before the Lord, let us see then who can stand on this fire and recite the Lordly prayer without being burned?” Then St. Palamon rebuked him saying, “cursed is this devil of pride who put this thought in your heart, it is better for you to stop this council of the devil”. But the deceived monk did not listen to him; he jumped quickly following the council of the devil of pride saying, “I will do it! I will do it!” and he stood on the fire and recited the Lordly prayer slowly and went out without burning his feet. He then left them going to his own place puffed up with pride. St. Bakhomios said to the old father, “my father, I declare to you that this matter shocked me how this monk stayed on the fire without his feet being burned”. Then St. Palamon answered, “do not marvel at this because the devil of pride is doing this for him permitted by God as God said in the Bible, “with the devious I also use sinuous ways” (2Sam 22:27). I tell you from now my son this person, if he continuous the same way will suffer a sad and dreadful end”.
- (iii) It happened with this monk that the devil kept pushing him in his pride until he thought something of himself, then he came to him in a shape of a beautiful woman knocking his door. When he opened she started begging him saying, “have pity on me and let me stay here till the morning as I suffered loss of all my possessions and my debtors would kill me or sell me as a slave, I’m fleeing to another place away from them”. In his blinded eyes he opened to her and then evil thoughts started to move him and he desired to have sex with her. As he approached her, she changed to the devil who hit him and fled laughing at him while tormenting him physically for a few days. When he could gather his strength, he came running to St. Palamon kneeling down and kissing his feet asking him to pray to God to forgive him this great sin. He confessed that he caused it to himself by his pride and disobedience. St. Palamon and St. Bakhomios wept for his sake and received him inside to pray for his sake but while they started to do this, the devil came and hit him again and kept tormenting him by hitting him to the ground, but with their prayers the devil left him. As St. Palamon was thinking to put him in another place till he repents, the devil came again and aroused him to hold a tree branch, trying to kill St. Palamon and St. Bakhomios. While St. Bakhomios tried to take the branch off his hand, the devil pulled that monk strongly and kept pushing him running away until he stumbled in a big furnace of fire and was burned and they wept in tears for his sake.

Spiritual Thought:

“When pride went up to Heaven, it made the Heavenlies fall down to hades and the Lord came in humility from Heaven to earth to save us from hades to Paradise” (from the paradise of the holy fathers)

The most guaranteed way to Heaven is the way of Humility and the person denying his/her own will and thought and submitting him/herself to the advise of his/her spiritual father.

We never trust ourselves but our trust is only in our Lord who Said, “learn from Me for I am Humble and Meek in heart” (Matthew 11:29)

8. God Calls St. Bakhomios To Start The System Of Monastic Community

- (i) St. Bakhomios on his way back from crossing the river to buy their needs, he used to go to a desolate place full of broken trees and branches, thorns and weed plants. He used to stay there for a while to enjoy a time of prayer quietly with his beloved Lord Jesus Christ and then collect what they needed from the broken branches to be used as fire wood. Sometimes he used to continue praying, not feeling the time until the ground under his feet became mud from his tears and sweat. If a thorn hit his feet, he would remember the thorn of sin that hitted mankind and caused death upon Adam and his descendants and also the thorn that pierced the Head of our Lord to remove the sin from us. This place he used to go to was called in Coptic **“Tabanseen”** or used to be named **“Tabenna”**.
- (ii) One day while he was there in his prayers, an angel appeared to him and told him **“God sent me to you to start a new system in monastic life which will make monasticism a bit easier and more affordable to many who cannot achieve it the way it is now. This explains the dream which you had at the night of your Baptism, which was the dew gathered in your hand turned to honey, dropping and spreading on the ground. This new system will enable monks to live together in a monastery to support each other and help each other growing, fulfilling the commandments of our Lord on the way to Heaven. This is the meaning of the dream that you, loving the Lord with all your heart and being filled with the sweet words and Commandments of the Lord which is like honey; you will start this system, leading thousands of people in this way to the Lord. The honey that spread on the ground symbolises to the monks with their pure and beautiful way of life spreading here in this area and throughout the whole world. Go back to your father Palamon and ask his permission and when you come here to start, I’ll come to you again and deliver to you a copper sheet written in them all the instructions on how to establish and run this new system of monasticism”**.
- (iii) St. Bakhomios returned to his spiritual father St. Palamon who told him that, **“I was expecting this to happen since you told me about this dream”**. He added, **“I feel it is too hard for me to live without you after I’ve been used to you with me**

for seven years in full obedience and especially in growing old. I feel it is better for me my son to come with you in the area which the Lord appointed to start in and be with you until it is settled and until the Lord allows me to be free of the heavy body and depart of this world”.

9. Starting The System Of Monastic Community

- (i) Both St. Palamon and St. Bakhomios traveled to this area called “**Tabanseen**” where the angel chosen by God told him to start this new system of monastic community. St. Palamon stayed with him until he started to build a small dwelling for himself and then said to him, “I feel my soul within me is eager to go back to my solitude. It has been informed to me by my God that He Had chosen you for this great thing, to build a monastery here which will be filled with men desiring the full life with Christ. God will bestow upon you patience, long-suffering and wisdom to lead them in this angelic way of monastic life. One thing I request from your love, is that you visit me always to see how you are so I can rejoice and feel supported when I see you. I will also try with all my ability, according to my health to visit you between your visits to also fill my heart with happiness, seeing the success of the work which the Lord entrusted you for.”
- (ii) It occurred like this for some time but not for long as St. Palamon became very sick and weak. This made St. Bakhomios’ visits more frequent and this continued for some time. Once when St. Bakhomios visited him, he felt that he was very close to his departure, so he called the fathers and brothers in the surrounding area who used to be disciples for St. Palamon. They surrounded him till the Lord allowed his soul to come out of his body. They all wept, kissing his hands and feet as he was a great father and guide to them all. They kept all the night in prayers and praises and then prayed the Holy Mass. They then buried his body and St. Bakhomios returned to the area where he started to build the monastery.

10. Saint Bakhomios’ Brother Joins him

- (i) Bakhomios had an elder brother named John whom he hadn’t seen since the time he left to join the army. When all the other young men returned from the war except St. Bakhomios, his elder brother John kept searching for him until he heard about his conversion to Christianity and his monastic life. He finally found him and came to where he was. St. Bakhomios received him joyfully and preached to him about Christianity saying that, “the life in the world is temporary compared to eternal life after death and it is not wise to waste the eternal life for some enjoyments in this short time we are living in the flesh”. John seeing the grace on his face and the way which he lived, worshiping the Lord, he was touched in his heart and he preferred to stay with St. Bakhomios in order to become a monk like him.
- (ii) They used to push themselves in great deal of fastings, prayers and watching over night. They used to sell what they worked for with their hands, get what they needed while giving the rest to the poor. Each one had a garment and an outside

cloak as well as a head cover like the one worn by the monks. They used to start their work and continue in it even if it got very hot from the sun during the day. They never changed their place of work until they finished it, enduring the very hot heat of the sun; fulfilling the commandment of the Lord:- *“He who wants to follow Me, let him deny himself, carry his Cross and follow Me”*. (Matthew 26:24)

- (iii) It happened once while waiving the palm leaves near the water of the river, that suddenly appeared a huge crocodile coming towards St. Bakhomios. John seeing this cried out to him loudly saying “run out quickly”. St. Bakhomios looked at him calmly with a smile saying; “Do you think John that the wild animals can hurt us unless God allows it?” While he was saying this, the crocodile was coming very close to St. Bakhomios, so he took some water in his palm, made the sign of the Cross on it and sprinkled it on the crocodile saying, “God gives you an order not to come here again”. On the spot the crocodile sank in the water and never appeared again. John seeing this came kissing his hands and feet saying to him, “I used to call you brother being older than you in age but after seeing this, I now call you my father”.

11. Building The First Monastery

- (i) The fame of St. Bakhomios went all around the surrounding area and some other cities. Many desired to come to stay with him and join the monastic life. St. Bakhomios felt the need to build a suitable dwelling for those who would come to him in obedience to God, Who Said to him through the angel that he would be a father for the monks in the new system.
- (ii) The first group of disciples for him were three men from the surrounding area (Besenta-ees, Sorous and Bishay) who after testing them for some time, accepted them and dressed them in the monastic habit. St. Bakhomios used to serve all their needs until they became strong on the way; then they could start to carry the responsibility with him. From this time, other groups of people started to come to him and he put them under test in the new building which was dedicated for receiving the new brothers. They would stay in it under test till they show their fitness before allowing them to enter the main building of the monastery.

12. St. Bakhomios Builds A Church In The Monastery Location

- (i) In the start, as the nearest Church was a bit distant from the monastery location and as the number of brothers joining him increased, he took them and built a small Church in the Adjacent village. Every Saturday he used to take the brothers for a walk to pray the vespers, the midnight praises and then attend the Holy Mass to commune from the Body and Blood of our Lord, then come back to the monastery Sunday morning.

- (ii) As the numbers of the brothers increased to one hundred, St. Bakhomios found it was fitting to build a Church in the middle of the buildings of the monastery. He used to call the priest from the village to pray the Mass for them as St. Bakhomios totally refused any priesthood for himself or to any of the monks. This was so that the devil might not fight them with the thought of priesthood, or trouble them with its pride. He used to say to them that, “a big fire arises from a small spark” and he was protective over his monks against the fire of envy or jealousy among them; so he preferred to take it off from it’s routes.

13. The Growth of the First Monastery and It’s Administration

- (i) As the number of the brothers increased, he used to establish more buildings to cater for them. There was a need to put a system for administration and how to run their day to day needs by the instructions of God, given to St. Bakhomios in the copper sheet delivered to him by the angel. St. Bakhomios made an administration system for his monasteries so that the monastery could fulfill all the needs of the monks inside it (it was self-sufficient).
- (ii) Inside the monastery there were living areas, kitchen and a dining hall, Church, library, workshops, gardens for vegetables and fruits, a place for the monks to go to when they get ill and store rooms. There was a monk appointed for the gate, others for cooking, others for sewing clothes, others for making shoes e.t.c.... from the different needs of the monks staying inside it. He always chose a monk who had good conduct and shown to be righteousness, to be in charge of each building or activity. He also used to replace that person in charge every few weeks with another person so that all could share the responsibility and also so that no one feels their authority over the others.
- (iii) There were also some monks in charge of selling the goods that the monk does during their work time and buying what the monastery needs. He used to meet with the brothers three times a week (one on Saturday and two on Sunday) to study the Bible with them and deliver to them his directions. He also allowed the monks in charge of the different buildings to conduct meetings on Wednesdays and Fridays, to give the needed administration instructions to the brothers who work in the building.
- (iv) He also divided the monks into groups according to their spiritual level and for each group, he set certain times for prayer; certain length of abstaining from food everyday; types and amounts of food and different monastic practices. The monks used to sleep in rooms i.e. three in each room. They used to sleep on beds built of stone with a bit of height on the end for the head. Some of them used to sleep while sitting on a chair and covering themselves with a cover.

14. The Arrival Of Saint Tadros The Disciple Of Saint Bakhomios

NB: *St. Tadros was the beloved disciple of St. Bakhomios whose name used to always appear with St. Bakhomios his father in the history. We'll put here a very brief about St. Tadros' childhood and how he found out about St. Bakhomios; but we will issue with the Grace of God another book about St. Tadros.*

- (i) St. Tadros was born from a rich family in Upper Egypt and he was educated at school as was the habit or according to rich families. Since his early age, he started to practice as much as he could of ways, very close to monastic life such as fastings etc....
- (ii) At the age of fourteen against the will of his parents, he joined one of the small monasteries in his area. Six years later, one of the Bakhomian monks (Fr. Bakos) visited their monastery to stay over night on his way back from getting different needs for the monasteries. In his stay, the monks gathered around him asking about St. Bakhomios, his teachings and monastic system. St. Tadros was listening and his heart was burning with fire desiring to join the monasteries under the spiritual guidance of St. Bakhomios. After the meeting was concluded, St. Tadros went to the room where Fr. Bakos was and begged him to take him to see St. Bakhomios. Fr. Bakos knowing that he was from a very rich family and still young, refused to take him to avoid any conflict with his parents.
- (iii) In the morning when Fr. Bakos walked back to the riverbank returning in the boat, St. Tadros had already prepared himself and kept walking behind him without him knowing. When Fr. Bakos got into the boat and started sailing north to the monastery, St. Tadros kept walking on the bank and calling him, "please take me with you". The brothers with Fr. Bakos said to him that, "he seems very tired of walking and insisting to come with us, let us accept him and leave the matter to Bakhomios to decide". So they returned to the bank and accepted him into the boat.
- (iv) St. Bakhomios knew by the spirit about the coming of St. Tadros with the brothers and when Fr. Bakos greeted him, he reported his journey to him then St. Bakhomios asked him about Tadros which shocked everyone.
- (v) When St. Tadros was called to meet St. Bakhomios, he couldn't believe it and kept kissing his hands and feet with many tears thanking God that He fulfilled his desire and allowed him to be under the spiritual guidance of St. Bakhomios.

Spiritual Thought:

"Everything you ask in prayer, believing you will receive" (Matt 21:22).

It is obvious from what we mentioned about St. Tadros, that he had been praying a lot over this very night and although he was refused by Fr. Bakos to go with him, he was confident that God would listen to his request and allow it. We have to highlight the fact that he put his effort in prayer and showed his insistence to have what he thought

was the best for his monastic life. The effort he did by walking all the way to the riverbank after a sleepless night and insisting by following the boat while sailing north; God looked to his sincere heart and granted him what he desired, especially because it was a spiritual desire.

This tells us the way to achieve spiritual goals. It is a trinity of things working together. These are:

- 1. you pray for what you desire in your heart,*
- 2. you put your utmost effort into it,*
- 3. God looking to your sincerity, He opens the way for you.*

- (vi) St. Tadros pushed himself very much in full obedience and submission to his father St. Bakhomios. This made St. Bakhomios feel his very sincere heart and seeing his great humility, trusted him to be his private disciple to be with him in all his movements. Eventually he used to send him to manage different matters in the monasteries on his behalf.
- (vii) St. Tadros had a great role in the Bakhomian monastic community during the life of St. Bakhomios and also after his departure. He was the only who could control the monasteries, following the same system of St. Bakhomios after the fail of three consecutive fathers to do so.
- (viii) The news of the high monastic level of St. Tadros reached his city of birth. His mother with his younger brother Paphnautius came to visit him. His brother Paphnautius seeing with his eyes the high spiritual life of the monks there, he stayed and became a monk under the fatherhood of St. Bakhomios. Later on he was appointed to be the father in charge (Abbot) of one of the monasteries.

15. The Coming Of St. Bakhomios' Sister To him

- (i) St. Bakhomios also had a sister called Mariam who was still a virgin after her brother John left home to St. Bakhomios. She found out where they were and came to them. When the monk in charge of the gate informed St. Bakhomios about her coming, he sent to her the following message:- “it is enough to know that I am still alive and I am well with the Grace of my Lord God and Saviour Jesus Christ; but don't be upset that you will not be able to see me. If you would like to seek the salvation of your soul and join us in this angelic way of monastic life, I can build you a monastery and I am sure that with the Grace of God, many sisters will join you. By this, you will become a blessing to many other sisters to lead them on the way of salvation”. When his sister heard this message from the gatekeeper, she was touched and wept in tears and sent a message back to St. Bakhomios that she accepts it and desires it in her heart to be a devoted nun for our Lord Jesus Christ.
- (ii) St. Bakhomios hearing this was glad and he received her and preached her with the word of life. She was Baptised and confirmed then St. Bakhomios took some of the brothers and built for her a small building to live in. Very soon a lot of virgin women heard about it and they came joining the convent, so St. Bakhomios built for them some more buildings and a small Church in the middle of them.

- (iii) St. Bakhomios chose one of the aged monks (Fr. Peter) who was witnessed by all for his virtuous life of Godliness and appointed him to visit them daily to guide them in the monastic way. St. Bakhomios gave them a booklet with all the rules and different practices they should follow like the monks. This convent grew until it catered for about two thousand virgins and it was a great blessing at that time. Mariam the sister of St. Bakhomios became the mother for all the virgin sisters in that convent, leading them in the way of the Lord with the help of Fr. Peter, under the guidance of St. Bakhomios. He used to follow up on them on a regular basis.
- (iv) If one of the brothers intended to visit his sister or a relative in the convent, St. Bakhomios used to send them to Fr. Peter who in turn informed the mother. She then is accompanied by one or two sisters staying with the visited sister during the visit. They then conclude the visit with a prayer and return back to their own places.
- (v) If one of the sisters passes away to the Lord, the mother informs Fr. Peter who sends the message to St. Bakhomios to prepare for the burial. The mother is helped by some sisters in preparing the body to be wrapped with a shroud; according to the burial custom and they carry her in a coffin to the Church for the funeral prayer. Then they carry her to the cemetery which used to be some distance in the mountain, bury her with the usual prayer and return feeling sorrowful for losing a sister.

16. An Incident Of St. Bakhomios' Sickness

- (i) It happened that St. Bakhomios got very sick to the extent that the fathers and brothers thought he was passing away. The fathers who were appointed in charge of the different monasteries and services, gathered around him in his sickness and started pursuing St. Tadros to promise to them that he will be in charge of the monasteries if anything was to happen to St. Bakhomios. They kept pushing it claiming that there was no one like St. Tadros who was very much with the same spirit of St. Bakhomios; also because he knew everything about the monasteries as he used to accompany St. Bakhomios everywhere. St. Tadros kept refusing this thought in his humility but under the continuous pressure of the other fathers, he accepted.
- (ii) God visited Saint Bakhomios with healing and became well and he knew in his spirit that something happened while he was unconscious in his sickness. In his fatherly love, he mentioned this to the fathers meaning to guide them on the way to Heaven and protect them from the hit of pride and vainglory. St. Tadros hearing this, being a very honest person answered before anyone else did and explained to him what had happened, mentioning that he cannot hide it. He said that he accepted the request of the fathers under their pressure; while also explained that in his heart he never thought in leadership or to become a

replacement to his father St. Bakhomios. St. Bakhomios being an experienced spiritual father; to protect his beloved son St. Tadros from the devilish trials answered, “although I know that you didn’t mean it or want it in your heart but it is still a sin to do so. To recover from it, you need to keep some time in solitude away from all responsibilities and to practice some work of the beginners until I tell you to return back”.

- (iii) St. Tadros accepted this wholeheartedly and even while he was in this period of time appointed to him for this spiritual exercise by St. Bakhomios, he used to cry in tears asking the Lord to forgive him his sin.
- (iv) This incident was the reason that St. Bakhomios at his departure, appointed another father to be the leader for the monasteries after him while in the same time, he inspired St. Tadros to take on for the leadership of the monasteries. This will be explained later.

Spiritual Thought:

“ For whom the Lord loves, He chastens and scourges every son He receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons, for what son is there his father does not chasten” (Heb 12:6,7).

From this incident, we see that the spiritual way is not easy at all and needs a lot of cautiousness and this is more highlighted in the monastic life. It tells us about how those holy fathers were very concerned in the salvation of their children. To achieve this, sometimes they need to act like the surgeon i.e. while they are wounding with a scalpel, they are healing at the same time. It also explains how much the monks at that very early time were very obedient to their fathers and accepting all their guidance without any winging. This was the mystery behind the great virtues and high spiritual progress they showed which was witnessed by the whole world which moved many prominent people to travel to Egypt and walk over the deserts to meet one of those holy fathers to seek a word of spiritual benefit.

17. St. Bakhomios’ Final Sickness And Departure

In the last year of St. Bakhomios’ life, pestilence (a plague) hit the people in the areas where his monasteries were. It killed many people as well as many fathers of their monasteries (it killed about 130 of the monks). St. Bakhomios himself while he was always visiting the brothers who were sick, he himself got infected.

- (i) It happened once while he was working in the fields with the brothers during harvest time, that he lost his balance and fell on his face. The brothers hurried to help him and they found that he had a very high temperature. They carried him quickly to the monastery where the house was allocated for the sick people were. Being their father whom they all loved, they tried to comfort him by all means during this severe sickness but he refused totally any special treatment offered to him, making himself exactly equal to everyone. The symptoms of this sickness is; colour of skin quickly changes, the eyes become dark red like blood and gets to stages like becoming out of conscious as if a person is in a shock.

- (ii) St. Bakhomios started to get sick during the Holy great fasting and he became even more affected in the beginning of the Passion Week. He had a vision of an angel who came to him saying that, “the Lord will accept from you a great offering in the day of the feast of the Resurrection”. He thought that it meant that he will depart on the Resurrection feast day but what actually happened on that day was Fr. Paphnatiou (the brother of St. Tadros his disciple) departed after the Mass of the Resurrection feast.
- (iii) The sickness did not stop St. Bakhomios from fasting the same habit of Passion Week while it was very painful to him. In the evening of the Holy great Friday after the prayer, he gathered all the fathers and brothers of the main monastery where he was staying and started telling them how he feels in his spirit and that he will soon depart from the world. He reminded them about all the monastic rules, the spiritual ways which he taught them, how he was making himself an example for them in everything and that he did not ask them to do something that he did not first practice. He commanded them to keep all the principles and laws of their monasticism which will help them to inherit the Kingdom of Heaven.
- (iv) As St. Bakhomios spoke to them with many similar things, St. Tadros was next to him weeping in tears all the time feeling the great sorrow that he will lose his beloved spiritual father. St. Bakhomios’ sickness stayed long with him until three days before the feast of Ascension of our Lord (forty days after the Resurrection).
- (v) At that time, St. Bakhomios felt that his departure was at hand so he called all the Abbots in charge of the different monasteries and mentioned to them that he is soon departing. He asked them to choose one of the fathers to lead them in the way of the Lord replacing him. They all wept and said to him, “it is too hard for us to know that you are leaving us, we know nothing but your teachings for us and you are our father after Christ; so we ask you to appoint whom you see fitting to lead us”.
- (vi) St. Bakhomios said to them, “I feel that Fr. Petronios will be a leader for you in Christ after me”. After the fathers left him and on the evening on the feast of Ascension while Tadros was with him serving his needs, he looked at him and said to him, “after my departure and burial, do not leave my body in the same place but remove it to another place as I don’t want anyone to honor my body after my departure”. St. Tadros answered with many tears that he will do all that he commands him to do. Then St. Bakhomios held the beard of St. Tadros with one hand and with the other hand taped on his breast and said to him, “do not neglect my bones after my departure” and he repeated this three times. St. Tadros thought he might be meaning about what he asked for earlier about removing his body but he also thought that he might mean looking after the spiritual needs of the monks. This was due to the knowledge of the great love that St. Bakhomios had to his monks and how he always cared for them in the sense that they are the members of his body. While he was thinking about this, St. Bakhomios looking at him confirmed to him that he means both meanings (to remove his body and

also to get the monks back on the same rules and principles of monastic life which means the leadership of the monasteries). There were some of the Abbots of the monasteries in the same room while St. Bakhomios said this to St. Tadros.

- (vii) After St. Bakhomios went out of conscious for some time, he opened his eyes and signed himself with the sign of the Holy Cross three times and delivered his spirit in the hands of our Lord Jesus Christ. The eyes of some of the fathers surrounding him were opened and saw many angels surrounding St. Bakhomios and chanting beautiful spiritual praises, while one of them is carrying his soul. The place was filled with a beautiful aromatic fragrance of incense which stayed there for a few days after his departure.
- (viii) St. Tadros closed the eyes of St. Bakhomios with his hand like Joseph the righteous when he closed the eyes of his father Jacob in the Old Testament. The fathers around him cried in tears. All the other fathers and monks surrounded his body and in tears were kissing his hands and feet while prepared his body for burial to their great and beloved father. After praying the psalms, praises and prayers of the funeral, they buried him with great sorrow. Later on St. Tadros took his body to another place according to his request and where his body is, is unknown until now (there is a guessing to where it is which will be explained later).
- (ix) Saint Bakhomios' departure was on the fourteenth of the Coptic month Bashans which was the night of the feast of Ascension in that year. He was sixty years old at his departure. He started his monastic life at the age of twenty-one and spent thirty-nine years in the monastic life until the Lord allowed him to depart from this funeral world. His departure was year 352 AD.

SOME LESSONS ON THE LIFE OF ST BAKHOMIOS

“Remember those who guided you, who have spoken the Word of God to you. Look to the outcome of their life and imitate their faith” (Heb 13,7).

The life of St. Bakhomios is full of great lessons to learn from. To mention them all we'll need a separate book with more than 200 pages, but we will mention here some of them as a model to learn off from the life of this great saint. We will also mention after this, some of his sayings and teachings to the monks:

1. **His struggle against the devils** – The devils used to fight St. Bakhomios in different ways, trying to either get him to fall in sin or to stop his struggle. As he grew in the Grace of God, they used to fight him as a sort of confrontation face to face but with the help of the Lord, he was able to overcome their trials.

- (i) Once when he used to kneel down to pray, they made it as if the ground is divided under his feet, in the shape of a very deep pit as if it will swallow him in the bottom of the earth. He used to not fear at all but do the sign of the cross and pray, *“even if I walk in the shadow of the valley of death, I will fear nothing because You are with me”* (Psalm 23, 4).
 - (ii) Once while he was praying, they tried to stumble him and as It didn’t work, they tried to make him laugh by getting a dry leaf tree tied in a very thick rope and appear like four or five men struggling hard to pull it. He used to close his eyes and pray the psalms, doing the sign of the cross and they disappeared.
 - (iii) Once as he was going from his own place to work in the field, they appeared in the shape of two long queues of army soldiers walking in front of him, as if in a big procession honouring a great man and saying to one another, *“give way to the great man of God and bow and honour to him”*. But he used to close his eyes and pray, *“the enemies stood in front of me all day long but Your Hand O Lord lifts me up”*.
 - (iv) They used to appear like animals and wild birds screaming in his face to frighten him but he used to pray saying, *“the Lord is my light and my salvation of whom shall I fear”*. (Psalm 27, 1)
 - (v) When he sat down to eat, they used to appear to him like a naked woman sitting next to him, sharing his food and he used to close his eyes and pray.
 - (vi) When he used to stand in his own place to pray, they tried to distract his thought in different ways and as this didn’t work, they tried to shake the whole building as if an earthquake had happened and the building is about to get knocked down. He used to pray saying, *“our God is our Refuge and supporter in our troubles, a very present help in trouble therefore we will not fear. Though the earth be removed....”* (Psalm 46, 1 &2).
- + And many other similar ways the devils tempted St. Bakhomios but he always took The Lord to be his shield against all the trials.

Spiritual Thought:

The devils who were originally angels in Heaven have been kicked out because of their sin and they envy us ‘mankind’. They know as a fact that after the Lord bestowed upon us His salvation through His great love, if we perfect our struggle on the way to Heaven as much as it is possible for us as humans, we will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven in stead of them. For this reason they hate us the ‘true believers’ in our Lord Jesus Christ. It is too hard for the devil to see any Christian fighting the sin and resisting all temptations through the power of our Lord Jesus Christ and standing still without fighting that person; using all different means to make him/her fall in sin. We the children of our Lord Jesus Christ know that our victory over the devils is guaranteed through our struggle supported with the power and Grace of our Lord as St. Paul said, “I can do all things through Christ Jesus who strengthens me” (Phil 4,13).

The spiritual person whenever he/she is confronted with the trial from the devil or any difficult matter, the first thing he/she should do is pray and by this you get the power from God against the cruelty of the devil. The continuous life of spiritual practices (Holy Communion, prayer, reading the Bible, attending Church meetings etc... becomes like a strong fence surrounding the true struggler against the darts of the devil).

18. Virtue Of Humility In The Life Of St. Bakhomios

- (i) Pope Athanasius the apostolic heard a lot about St. Bakhomios and the news about his wisdom, management and spiritual leadership to the monasteries reached the Pope while he was in Alexandria. The Pope arranged a trip to Upper Egypt to visit his children, the sheep of his flock in the different diocese. When he arrived to the area of **Nitentori** where St. Bakhomios was baptised by its bishop ‘Abba Serapion’; bishop Serapion requested Pope Anthansius to ordain St. Bakhomios a priest for the monks. He tried this before but St. Bakhomios refused it. The Pope said, “I heard a lot about this great man of God and I’m meaning to visit his monasteries on my trip and I feel that he fully deserves the priesthood”. When St. Bakhomios heard about the visit of the Pope, he was happy to see him and very anxious to get his blessings; but when he knew that there was a request from bishop Serapion to ordain him a priest, he disappeared and hid himself in one of his monasteries in another area. When Pope Athanasius arrived to the main monastery, he found that St. Bakhomios had arranged everything for his visit and disappeared to flee from the priesthood. Pope Athanasius left a message for St. Bakhomios with his monks saying, “wholeheartedly I desired to see you for what I heard about you, but now I recognise that you are greater than what I heard. Blessed are you as you fled from the vainglory of this world and blessed is your wisdom to avoid this matter which always causes jealousy between monks. While you are the father for them all, you applied it in yourself firstly to be a true example for them in the way of humility of our Lord Jesus Christ”.
- (ii) St. Bakhomios used to work with his monks in all different jobs required from them as one of them. Once it happened while they were going to work in the harvest, St. Bakhomios was carrying the necessary items for it. One of the new brothers wanted to carry it instead of St. Bakhomios, being their father and growing old but St. Bakhomios totally refused saying, “how can I make myself better than you that you carry my stuff for me?”.
- (iii) Once St. Bakhomios got very sick so they took him to the house which was allocated to care for the sick. Being sick, they made some decent food for him and when he saw it, he asked St. Tadros to bring him some water and he poured it on the food. Then St. Tadros poured some water on St. Bakhomios’ hands to wash them before eating, so St. Bakhomios accepted it but after it, he took some water and washed the feet of St. Tadros his disciple. So St. Tadros said to him, “why do you do this my father?” St. Bakhomios replied, “I poured some water on it so I don’t get used to the food to encourage the body to enjoy it, and I washed

your feet after you washed my hands to fulfill the commandment of the Lord,
“who is first of you, let him be the servant for you all”.

19. The Virtue Of Wisdom In The Life Of St. Bakhomios

- (i) In one of his monasteries, one of the monks asked the Abbot in charge of this monastery to give him a position of leadership among the brothers and he was not fit for it. The Abbot knowing that he was a stubborn and disobedient monk said to him, “I asked our father Bakhomios about this and he said that you are not fit for it”. This monk got very angry and said to the Abbot, “let us go now to father Bakhomios to see why he claims this about me”. When they arrived, St. Bakhomios was working with the brothers to build a wall. This monk cried out saying, “come down O you who claim you are our father while you are a liar and prove to me why I am not fit for this position?” St. Bakhomios did not answer him and he came down and took the Abbot of that monastery aside and asked him what had happened; so the Abbot said to him, “forgive me my father, you know that this monk is giving us a very hard time and I wanted to cast him out but I was patient to win him for his salvation. Knowing his stubbornness. I was sure he will never listen to me so I used your name so he obeys”. Then St. Bakhomios said, “listen to my advice and give him what he wants so we can save him from the devil of pride that is possessing his soul”. St. Bakhomios came back to this monk saying, “forgive me my son if I upset you, I told the Abbot to give you the position you are after”. After returning back to their monastery and after a few days, this monk awoke up to himself and came back to St. Bakhomios kneeling before him kissing his hand and telling him, “forgive me for what I said in my ignorance and foolishness. The very wise act you did to me saved my soul as I was meaning to leave to monastic life if you acted tough with me”.
- (ii) Once some fathers from an area close by who follow a heresy and were excommunicated by the Church, came and knocked at the main monastery where St. Bakhomios was and sent him a message saying, “if you are the man of God and follow the true faith, come with us to see who of us can cross the river walking, to prove who the true person of God is?”. When St. Bakhomios heard this, he gave them an answer saying, “the weak Bakhomios is struggling not to show off by crossing the river in front of people but to do my best to cross the sea of this world to achieve the eternal Kingdom of Heaven”. When they heard this answer they were ashamed and went back to their place.
- (iii) St. Bakhomios used to teach his monks saying, “do not seek after miracles but rather after spiritual growth and help everyone as much as you can to be saved. If you want to arise a dead from his/her death, return a sinner from his/her sinful way; (refer to James 5:20) if you want to open the eyes of a blind, return a heretic to the true belief and if you want to heal a paralytic, help a person tied with bad habits to be freed from his/her habits”. Likewise you can apply the different miracles to different types of healing to those who are spiritually sick (different types of sinners).

20. The Virtue Of Prayer In The Life Of St. Bakhomios

Verse 1: - *“Give ear to the voice of my cry O my King and my God for to You I will Pray” (Psalm5: 2),*

Verse 2: - *“Pray without ceasing” (1Thess 5:17).*

Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us that prayer is the key for everything and gave us an example for prayer as He used to stay alone in the mountain for many hours to pray, while He did not need to pray as He is our God.

From our Lord, all our Holy fathers learned the virtue of prayer. It was very much manifested in all the Holy fathers of the Church. We’ll mention some stories to show this great spiritual virtue of prayer in the life of St. Bakhomios. He used to put all matters in prayer before taking a decision about them like Moses the prophet.

- (i) St. Bakhomios used to have monks from different nationalities and interpreters to help him communicate with them. Once a Roman monk requested to speak to him, so he called him in with an interpreter but the monk said to him through the interpreter that he needed to speak to him direct as it was a private matter. Hearing this St. Bakhomios asked him to wait and he went to his own cell to pray and beg the Lord saying, “You entrusted me for these souls and now I cannot help this person because of language barrier, so please Lord give me understanding to help him as you have given to the apostles”. He continued praying for a few hours and during this, he was taken out of conscience and saw a vision as if an angel came, opened his right hand and put a little piece of paper in it and closed his hand on this paper. He then returned back to his conscience and recognised that the Lord granted him the ability to understand the Latin language of that monk. He went back to the Roman monk and spoke to him freely without an interpreter.
- (ii) Some fathers from another area came to visit St. Bakhomios. When he came to them in the guestroom and while talking with them, he smelled a bad smell which he could not recognise what it was for. Also he was not feeling comfort within himself but he couldn’t find any reason for this. After they finished their visit and left, he went to his own cell and kept praying to the Lord to reveal this matter for him. During his prayer the Lord revealed to him that they were heretics and pretending to show themselves as Orthodox to deceive the people, so he quickly came out and sent three monks to hurry to catch them on their way, sending a message with them saying that, “the Lord revealed to me that you are following a wrong faith, you better repent and return to the true faith lest you will lose your salvation”. Those fathers marveled about how he found that out while they did not show at all any sign of their wrong beliefs in their conversation. They then returned back with the monks asking for forgiveness and to learn the true way.
- (iii) On a visit to one of his monasteries while he was walking in the garden, he crossed by a fig tree and he felt a spirit of discomfort next to it so he called the

garden keeper and said to him, “I’m not feeling comforted with this fig tree, please uproot it”. The garden keeper pleaded with him saying, “this tree throws a lot of figs for the monks, why do you want to uproot it my father?” Then St. Bakhomios didn’t want to haste his decision and said to him, “leave it to the morning”. He went to his own cell and kept praying about it, then it was a time for the evening meeting with the monks. He went to the meeting and spoke to them the Word of God explaining the Holy Bible. During his talk, one of the monks was touched in his heart, moved by the spirit of God and at the end of the meeting he lifted up his hand wanting to say something. St. Bakhomios allowed him to talk; then that monk said allowed in front of everyone, “I feel I have to make a loud confession. I used most of the days to go at night to the big fig tree in the garden to take some fruits to eat it more than what was allocated for each monk. I ask you my father to forgive me this sin and pray for me to stop this bad habit”. St. Bakhomios answered, “I thank the Lord my God who revealed to me the reason of the uncomfortable feeling I had concerning this tree which was about to push me to uproot it. He told the garden keeper to keep it and said to the monks, “if anything causes any spiritual offence for us, it’s better to get rid of it no matter what its value is”.

21. Models For Some Other Virtues

In the life of St. Bakhomios there is a lot of virtues; but for the limitation of containing it in a small booklet to make it easy for our new generation, we’ll mention here two examples of the many virtues.

(i) Virtue Of Obedience:

The virtue of Obedience is one of the most important virtues in spiritual life and extremely essential in monastic life.

“Behold to obey is better than sacrifice and to heed than the fat of rams” (Isam 15:22).

St. Bakhomios used to give an example by himself in teaching the monks about obedience. He used to put on an old outwardly garment which started to warn out. Father Tanasee who was in charge of the guests, saw that this garment was not fitting for St. Bakhomios ‘the father of all the monasteries’ to meet the guests as it was old. He asked St. Tadros to take it away and replace it with a new one as St. Tadros was in charge of serving the needs of St. Bakhomios. When the evening came, it was a cold night and St. Bakhomios wanted to put his garment on; finding the new one he didn’t want to use it and asked St. Tadros to get him his old one. St. Tadros said, “the old one is warn and please use this one” but St. Bakhomios repeated his request three times and as St. Tadros tried to convince him to use the new one, St. Bakhomios left without putting the garment on. After he did this, he came back to St. Tadros in tears and asked him to forgive him for what he did, as he should have obeyed him. He then took the new garment from St. Tadros and kept asking the Lord in his prayer for seven years to forgive him this sin of disobedience.

(ii) ***Virtue of Controlling the Tongue:***

Controlling the tongue in spiritual life is a very important issue as the tongue can make us fall in many sins. We can learn this from the letter of St. James chapter three. For example the verse: -“and the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body and sets on fire the course of nature and is set on fire by hell”.

On a visit to one of his monasteries, St. Bakhomios heard the monk in charge of the garden saying to one of the labors, “it is the season of grapes and the fruits will be up soon”. St. Bakhomios called him and said to him, “this phrase you said to the labor, what spiritual benefit did it give to him? Didn’t you know that the Lord said, “*one idle word you will give an account of it in the last day?* (Matt 12:36). We should be very cautious my son before saying anything to make sure that what we are going to say is needed and also will benefit those who hear it”.

22. Some Visions For St. Bakhomios

The great life of asceticism that St. Bakhomios achieved which purified his heart and adorned him with the fruits of the Holy Spirit, made him worthy to visualise many visions. We’ll mention here some of the important visions in his life and not all:

- (i) Once while he was in the monastery of **Tabanseen**, some monks came to him from the monastery of **Tomson** and informed him about one of their brothers who became sick and wanted to see St. Bakhomios. St. Bakhomios said to St. Tadros his disciple, “let us break our fasting, eat something little so we can travel to the monastery of ‘**Tomson**’ because I know that this monk, was struggling hard in his monastic life and may his sickness come to death”. Following the monastic habit, they stood to pray before eating and while praying, they saw a person shining with light standing in front of them, stretching his hands towards them and a voice saying, “I’m taking your prayers to lift it up as an aromatic incense before the Lord”. They both knelt down to the ground and continued praying for a long time. After they finished eating, they went on their way with the brothers who came from the monastery. After walking for some miles, St. Bakhomios stopped and told them, “you go your way to your monastery and I will go back with Tadros because that monk who was sick had already died”. They were all shocked and asked him, “how did you know?”. Then he said to them, “I was praying while walking and the Lord opened my eyes and I saw the angels carrying his soul to the Paradise and I heard their beautiful joyful chanting for his victorious soul as he could finish his struggle in our Lord Jesus Christ”.
- (ii) Another time while he was praying, he asked the Lord to show him how the souls depart from the bodies of the righteous and evil people. The Lord sent him an angel in a vision who explained to him everything that happens regarding the departure of the souls of the righteous and also to those who did not keep the commandment of the Lord, or those who did not believe in Him at all.

- (iii) Another time St. Bakhomios used to spend time in an isolated place to pray before talking to them about the Word of God. Once while doing this, he saw the Lord Himself sitting on His Throne of Glory and heard as if the Lord is teaching and explaining the parables in the Gospels. Later on in his talks to the monks, whenever he quoted those words which he heard in the vision, it used to come from his mouth very powerful as supported by a Divine power.
- (iv) Another time the Lord revealed to him a vision about what will happen to the souls of the wicked and sinful people in hades and what is awaiting them in the eternal hell. This was in a vision when he saw an angel, who took him and showed him everything about that. St. Bakhomios also saw some of the souls of the monks being tormented because they did not abide to the rules of monastic life and obedience and keeping the Commandment of the Lord.

23. The Bakhomian Monastic System

Introduction:

The monastic life in the whole world started in Egypt and from Egypt, it spread around to the whole world. The monastic life took its full appearance to be recognised in the second half of the third century through St. Anthony 'the great' - the father of monks and St. Bakhomios - 'father of community'. There were some trials from the monastic life during early Christianity, but it was for the little individual groups. It did not continue much as there was no clear system for it; E.g. there was a group who isolated themselves in the desert surrounding Alexandria year 70 AD. Also some individuals lived in solitude in different areas in a trial of monasticism by devoting their life for the Lord but it was only contained to their individual level. By the end of the third century and the beginning of the fourth century, the monastic life appeared clearly and widely spread around Egypt in three systems:

- 1. *The system of solitude and isolation which started by St. Anthony the great.***
Men from different ages who heard about him came to him and under his guidance, everyone stayed in a cave or a place in the deserts, practicing his monastic life under the guidance of St. Anthony. From St. Anthony, the monastic habit of dressing for monks was taken, which was shown to him by an angel sent to him by the Lord. The monastic system of St. Anthony in his time was located in the Eastern deserts of Egypt.
- 2. *The monastic system of community which started by St. Bakhomios called by the Lord directly through an angel.***
The system of communal monasticism was very much more convenient and accessible to different levels of people who desire monastic life and this helped great numbers of men and women to join the communal monasteries of St. Bakhomios; until they reached eighteen thousand monks in his time. All the monasteries of St. Bakhomios were located in far Upper Egypt.

3. *The monastic groups which started in the Northern deserts of Egypt (between Cairo and Alexandria).*

It started by St. Macarius the great who was led by an angel to this area and then he visited St. Anthony in the Eastern deserts. He stayed some with him and learned from him the monastic way. St. Anthony dressed him in the monastic habit (the monastic eskeem) and he returned back to the Northern deserts (it's called the valley of El-Natrun). While he stayed there, brothers gathered around him and they formed a monastic group under his leadership, living under the surrounding area. A Church was built for them in the area. One of his disciples who grew strong in the monastic way, moved to another area and became a father to another group and so on.

24. The Monastic System Of St. Bakhomios

As mentioned before, the system on which St. Bakhomios established his monasteries was given to him by the angel, who firstly appeared to him to call him to firstly start this system. When St. Bakhomios moved with the permission of his spiritual father St. Palamon to the area which the angel told him, the angel appeared to him again and gave him all the monastic rules, laws and systems for the monks written on a copper sheet. The Bakhomian system helped many people from different levels to achieve their desire in monastic life. From St. Bakhomios, his system spread to the rest of Egypt and then to the Western world. Now almost all the monasteries all around the whole world follow the system of St. Bakhomios; but sometimes with little changes according to the place and the life of the people and the time. Even in Egypt, the monasteries in the area of solitude for St. Anthony (the Eastern deserts), and those in the area of the monastic groups (the Northern deserts) follow the same system of St. Bakhomios. Also the same Bakhomian system is used in all the convent for nuns in Egypt and abroad.

To explain in full the monastic system of St. Bakhomios and all the rules that the monks have to follow is very long; but for the limitation of the booklet, we'll put here a small brief for the main rules for the monasteries and the monks.

25. The Main Rules For The Bakhomian Monastic System

- 1.** There was no age limitation for accepting the monk.
- 2.** Before accepting the monk, they have to make sure that he was working in a career and that his monastic intention is not the reason for fleeing a lack of life facilities; but with a desire from the heart.
- 3.** Investigation is made to make sure the person joining the monastic life is not fleeing any court punishment or judgment.
- 4.** When the person comes to join the monasteries, he is kept in a house at the gate of the monastery and away from the monasteries main building till the previous points are proved. Also he needs to show good conduct, obedience and real Christian manners. Then he is accepted with the approval of the Abbot of the monastery. He is then kept in a house for the beginners who seek monasticism (called Novices). One of the old

monks is appointed to teach them the monastic rules, help them to gradually learn the psalms off by heart and learn some sections from the Holy Bible. In this period, he is also allowed to share in some work and to be under test until he proves that he is fit for the monastic life.

- 5.** Passing the test, he is accepted inside the monastery buildings and the Abbot of the monastery appoints for him his place and his role in the different jobs of the monastery.
- 6.** The monastic dressing in the days of St. Bakhomios was simple. It consisted of a robe covering until under the knees without sleeves, a wide leather belt around the waist, a cover for the head like the monastic covers which comes down to the shoulder and a bit of the back, another cover of sheep skin around his breast and shoulders for winter and a long garment to cover the whole body when going to the Church, spiritual meetings and guest area. They used to wear sandals of leather when they go out or for work.
- 7.** St. Bakhomios divided the monks into groups according to their spiritual level with a Coptic letter on the back of the head cover, to distinguish which group the monk follows. He used to put every group of people with a similar spiritual level together in a separate house or building and they share the same system together.
- 8.** The food was offered twice a day in the afternoon and around evening. The food mainly was from bread, cooked vegetables, soup, cheese and fruits. They were not allowed to drink wine. They used to eat the meat in certain occasions such as feasts or when someone is sick.
- 9.** They used to enter the Church without shoes on to keep the Holiness and reverence of the house of God and they used to also enter the dinning room without shoes to minimise the noise.
- 10** It wasn't compulsory that every person should attend the meals in the appointed time, if someone wanted to fast longer he can do so with permission of the Abbot of the monastery. They used to sleep in cells either built or dug in the mountain and each cell has got three beds built of stone and covered in clay with a bit of height at the end for the head. The three beds in the room form a U shape. They used to spread a mat or something light on the beds and some of them used to put a sheet on the ground and sleep on it while some used to sleep sitting on a chair.
- 11.** There were certain times for public prayer which the group of the similar spiritual level do together in their house and there was also some personal prayers for each monk to do in his own place. As for the Holy Mass, they all attended together from all levels in the Church.
- 12.** Monks were not allowed to talk together during work while staying in their own places or any other place but only when discussing spiritual meditation and thoughts about the Bible study they had.
- 13.** It was a must that all the monks attend all the public prayer in the Church from the very beginning without any delay. They were also required to stand properly in Church with respect and share the responses together with one accord, without any distractions. No one was allowed to lead hymns and responses, only if they were permitted and allowed to by the Abbot of the monastery. They used to have Masses

on Saturdays and Sundays and the rest of the week was Agbia prayers and midnight praises.

14. There was a library for books for borrowing books to read. The time of borrowing was only one week to give opportunity for others to borrow the books.
15. The sharing of any work in the monastery was compulsory as it was a Biblical order by St. Paul (*"he who does not work, does not deserve to eat"* 2 Thess 3:10). The work in different jobs was allocated for the monks by the Abbot of the monastery.
16. It was a must that if anyone wanted to join the monastic life, the person would at least learn to read and write before being accepted. There were punishments for those who didn't follow the rules and these were on three levels. These are:
 - (i) Blaming the monk for his mistake in public before the others in the meeting (this was for the mistakes that was done in public to be dealt with on the spot).
 - (ii) For other bigger mistakes, the monk was punished by staying in his cell without going out for some days or weeks. Sometimes it happens where beating occurs for the very rebellious monk, but it was very rare. They considered it better to be beaten and corrected than being kicked out of monastic life.
 - (iii) For major mistakes and not wanting to repent or change after many trials and chances being given to the monk, the monk is kicked out of the monastic system.
17. There was a house for the sick people and this was under the supervision of the Abbot. It had different systems and rules from the normal monastic life, according to the status of the sick person.
18. St. Bakhomios made an Abbot for each monastery, helped by a chief monk in charge of each house and also a chief person in charge of certain working areas. As the number of monks was increasing rapidly, they made groups for work and each three or four groups together is called a tribe. Among themselves they choose a monk to be in charge for them. Every person in charge in his level, reports to the level higher than them and he in turn, reports to the higher level than him until it reaches the Abbot of the Monastery. The Abbot and the chief monks on the houses, used to have a meeting twice a week for their groups to give them the necessary directions.
19. St. Bakhomios used to have a meeting for the general Abbots of the monasteries on a regular basis to discuss the running and needs of the monasteries. He also used to go personally to visit all the monasteries in turns with St. Tadros his disciple. It occurred that he used to visit each monastery at least once a year and stay some time there. He sometimes used to send St. Tadros, his disciple to supervise some things happening in one of the monasteries.
20. St. Bakhomios used to have a general meeting for all the monks once a year during St. Mary's fasting (in the Coptic month Misra which falls in August). In this meeting, he firstly used to give absolution and forgiveness for all the mistakes which happened from any of the monks in charge or for any monk during the past year. He also used

to appoint new chief monks in different positions and in the same meeting, he used to give spiritual words of benefit and direction for the whole monastic community under the leadership.

What we mentioned above is a very brief about the monastic system of St. Bakhomios without any details. For each point of the twenty we mentioned, there are many details and rules. Also there were a lot of rules and guidelines for every single behavior and thing the monks does - either inside the monastery; in the work place; in the Church; in the library; his own place; the place for the sick; the guest room or when they are outside either on the boat or any city, carrying on things done or needed for the monastery.

26. The Monasteries Of St. Bakhomios

“How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the Gospel of peace, who bring glad tidings of good things” (Rom 10:15).

Our Lord Jesus Christ chose and called His Holy disciples and apostles and sent them to preach His Name in the whole world. The twelve Holy apostles assisted by the seventy disciples, had no facilities whatsoever to help them in their mission to preach the Name of our Lord in the whole world but only the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit; who descended upon them in the Pentecost. In spite of the terrible severe resistance and the persecution of the Jewish nation and Roman kings and rulers, with the Grace of God before the end of the first century in a short time, Christianity spread in almost everywhere in the whole world. It is as our Lord said, *“the faith in His Name and the work for His Glory is like a mustard seed whilst it is the smallest of all seeds but when it is put in the ground and watered by the Power of the Holy Spirit, it grows to the biggest of trees and all birds nest between it’s branches”.*

- (i) The same thing happened with the great St. Bakhomios who was called directly by God to start the monastic system of community. He started with a little dwelling he built for himself by the help of his spiritual father St. Palamon in the place where the angel appeared to him. This was the mustard seed put in the ground and kept by the Grace of God and watered by the Holy spirit which grew up to be not only a one monastery but nine monasteries at the end of the life of St. Bakhomios. Inside those monasteries there were about eighteen thousand monks added to a convent for nuns catered for about two thousand nuns. We have to mention here that St. Bakhomios established seven monasteries and two other monasteries in the surrounding area. Brothers requested to be under his leadership and he accepted joining them to his communal monasticism.
- (ii) The names of the monasteries are related to the area where the monastery was built. We'll try here to mention the names of those monasteries; but we have to mention that through the translation from Coptic to the European languages and back to Arabic, there happened some change in the names. The names of the monasteries are as follows:

1. The monastery of **Tabennesi** (Tabanseen Donasa/Deonasa).
This was the very first monastery that St. Bakhomios built and it is the belief that this was the place where the angel appeared to him and delivered him the copper sheet. This was also the place where St. Bakhomios started building a single dwelling for himself and stayed in it.
2. The monastery of **Phbow** (or Bafo or Edfu).
This monastery later on took the role of the main monastery or the great monastery. Maybe it had greater numbers of monks or the main leadership became in that monastery. There is a monastery in the name of St. Bakhomios in the city of **Edfo** in Upper Egypt which is in the governorate **Aswan**, but historically there is a confusion if this was the same one that was known as the great monastery or not. This monastery has been renovated in the time of his holiness Pope Shenouda III by the request of his grace bishop Hedra, the bishop of Aswan. His holiness pope Shenouda III sent Fr. Tadros El-Bakhoumi in November 1976 to start renovating that monastery. In 1980 the Holy Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church, headed by His Holiness Pope Shenouda III recognised that monastery and His Holiness gave the first five monks who were there at that time the name “El-Bakhoumi”. This was the first time after fifteen hundred years to have a Bakhomian monk in Egypt and the whole world. It is believed that the body of St. Bakhomios is buried in this monastery but there is no confirmation for that; while there are some incidents that tell about this which we might mention at the end of this booklet.
3. Joining the monastery of **Seneset** to the communal monasteries.
This was a monastery headed by Abba Amoun and when they heard about St. Bakhomios and studied his monastic rules, they requested from St. Bakhomios to accept them and he joined them under his leadership
4. Joining the monastery of ‘**Thmousons**’.
This monastery was under the care of Abba Youanis and he sent to St. Bakhomios saying, “the aroma of the holiness of your monasteries has spread and reached to us, we will be very happy if you accept us under your leadership”. St. Bakhomios accepted and joined them to his communal monasteries
5. Establishing a monastery in **Tsay/Tkahsmin**.
This monastery was through a revelation in a vision to St. Bakhomios to establish a monastery in this area. On the spot he took some brothers and went there and established his monasteries.
6. Establishing a monastery at **Smin**.
The bishop of Smin when he heard about St. Bakhomios, sent to him requesting that if he can kindly come to his area and establish a monastery as many people there are desiring the monastic life. St. Bakhomios accepted and went there and established a monastery.

7. Establishing the monastery at **Thbew (Tabou)**.

There was in this area a rich man called Patronios whose family had great possessions. He was eager to live fully for Christ, he didn't know what to do but he isolated himself in an area and built a little dwelling in it away from his family to worship the Lord. When he heard about St. Bakhomios, he sent to him telling about his desire and asking his help. St. Bakhomios came to the area with some of his monks and Patronios put a lot of money under his control so he built a monastery there and it grew up and filled the place with monks.

8. Establishing the monastery of **Tsmine (Tasmine)**.

With directions from God, St. Bakhomios took some monks and moved North towards **Tsmine** and there he built a monastery and it continued and was filled with monks.

9. Establishing the monastery of **Phnoun (Phanoun)**.

In another vision, St. Bakhomios was told to go to this area towards the south to build a monastery. It happened so and this became the ninth monastery during the life of St. Bakhomios.

Spiritual Thought:

“The Lord said, “Difficult is the road and narrow is the gate which leads to Heaven, little there is who find it” (Matt 7:14).

It occurs to many people that they feel the spiritual way hard and difficult in achieving spiritual fruits. This thought makes many people give up and never try even to start the spiritual way and even if they started, they are short breathered and quickly give up at any difficulty stumbling their way. It should be noted that all Christianity as our Lord said to us is based on struggling and sacrifice. While the road is difficult and the gate is narrow as mentioned above, we should not forget that the Lord is always with us to support and that the Holy Spirit is inside us to work with us. While the Lord is fully wanting to help us, He also does not want to spoil us. We have to show Him that we want it and to put an effort in it to prove this to Him. He is there with His great love and power to help us and fight the devil for us as we have explained from the beginning of Christianity. In the establishment of the system of monastic community, it started with something very little but with struggle, keenness and persistence it was achieved. The Lord took this small seed of struggle and persistence and grew it to become a great tree. The same thing for everyone of us, we should not consider the difficult road and the narrow gate but rather, look positively to the Lord who loves us and is always with us and also to the Holy Spirit who dwells inside us which works in us and put our eyes to Heaven. Start with the Grace of our Lord and be fully assured to be victorious in His Name.

27. Some Miracles Of St. Bakhomios During His Life

“But when you do a charitable deed, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing” (Matt 6:3).

As we explained before, St. Bakhomios fled from vainglory in all directions as much as he could. He always taught his monks to do the same i.e. to flee from all ways of showing any good deed before men.

Concerning the miracles of St. Bakhomios mentioned in section 19 (iii), St. Bakhomios was very determined to flee from it and whenever someone needed his blessings, they used to seek it without letting him know; we will see how in the following miracles which happened during his life. We'll put here only few of them as a model but not all:

1. Healing a woman who was bleeding

There was a woman who was bleeding for a long time and doctors could not help her, she heard about St. Bakhomios and wanted him to pray for her. She told this to a friend who used to visit the monasteries of St. Bakhomios to deliver some needs for the monastery. He said to her that the following week he is going to the monasteries as St. Bakhomios was meaning to build a new building for guests and he will show him some needs. He advised her to come with him and stand outside on the way where he will accompany St. Bakhomios on the location of the building and that when she touches St. Bakhomios, she will be healed. It happened exactly like this and she was healed on the spot from her bleeding.

2. Healing the wife of one of the rulers

There was a ruler of a city in the surroundings whose wife got sick for some time and all medical ways failed to help her. He asked the priest of the village that when he goes on Sunday to conduct the Mass for the monks, to take him and his wife with him so that St. Bakhomios prays for them. The priest said to him, "I doubt that Bakhomios will accept this but at the end of the Mass, let her stay in the guest room and I'll call Bakhomios to greet both of you and I'm sure that she will be healed by his prayers without asking him". It happened so and after the Mass, the priest informed St. Bakhomios saying that, "the ruler of the neighbored city is in the guestroom and they want to greet you before they leave". St. Bakhomios went to the guestroom and greeted them and told them, "I'll pray that God be with you on your way back". The rulers wife felt her strength back in her body after greeting St. Bakhomios and she arrived to her own place in full health.

3 Casting out demons

They used to bring to him people who were demon possessed and he did not refuse to pray for them. He believed that the demon possesses a person because of a sinful life and if he prays for the demon to go out, he is helping the person for his/her salvation. He used to help such people as part of his continuous intention to save souls; he casted demons from many people and sometimes he did not pray for them but asked them to repent then they will be healed. The following story is an example:

(i) They once got to him a young lady who was demon possessed and suffered a lot from the devil. They asked for St. Bakhomios at the gate to help them by casting out the demon. The monk at the gate refused to allow her to enter before getting permission from St. Bakhomios; so her father requested to accompany the gate keeper to St. Bakhomios to explain her situation to him. When St. Bakhomios met her father, he said

to him, “your daughter is not a virgin, she had fallen in sin. Tell her to confess her sins and repent and she will be healed by the grace of our God”. The father went back and confronted his daughter with what St. Bakhomios said and she could not deny it. After she repented and confessed, she was healed.

4. His power over wild beasts

Once he was standing taking with some monks in an open area for guidance. He knelt down with them to pray and as he was praying, he felt that there were two snakes between his feet. He was feeling them but he never moved or showed any sign of fear or trouble on his face until he finished his prayer. When he asked for a light, they got him an oil lamp, yet they saw that all the time while he was praying there were two big snakes between his feet however the two snakes could not touch him.

5. The power of his prayer

Once he visited the monastery at the area called ‘**Thmousons**’ and while he was walking in the garden, he stood next to a big fruitful tree for some time as he was feeling something unusual. He kept standing next to it praying until God would reveal to him what this feeling meant. He found out that the new brothers used to come secretly to pick from its fruits and eat off it in addition to the portions allocated to them. During his prayer, he saw a devil on the top of this tree and he knew it was the devil of gluttony which tempts the new brothers to do so. He asked the monk in charge to uproot it but that monk objected claiming, “it is a very old and good strong fruitful tree”. St. Bakhomios replied, “leave this matter now and the will of God will be done”. He stayed with them for a few days and on the third day, this tree fully withered from its roots and they all marveled about this. When they informed him about it he said to them, “in my prayers my heart was in the understanding that loosing a very big and good tree is not as important as loosing some souls to fall in the sin of gluttony which is much more important to me”.

28. The Monasteries of St. Bakhomios After His Departure

St. Bakhomios before his departure knew that the only one who would be able to keep his monastic community the same way is St. Tadros his disciple. He also made this clear to St. Tadros when he held his beard at the last few minutes before his departure and said to him three times, “do not neglect my bones after my departure”; by which he meant indirectly that he will be a leader for the monasteries later on. It happened that when the Abbots of the different monasteries gathered around St. Bakhomios before his departure and asked him about who will lead them after; he appointed Fr. Patronios the Abbot of the monastery **Tsmine** (Tasmine) to be their leader. St. Bakhomios did this in his wisdom for two reasons:

- 1- Because Fr. Patronios was much older in age than St. Tadros his disciple,
- 2- To protect St. Tadros his disciple from devilish temptations remembering what happened during St. Bakhomios’ first sickness.

It occurred that Fr. Patronios could not handle this great responsibility of leading this big number of monks added that in his old age, he got sick quickly and felt that his departure was at hand. He gathered the Abbots to ask them about whom they wanted to lead them after him. They answered saying, “we know none other but you after Bakhomios, you choose for us”. He answered, “during many prayers for this matter, the Lord revealed to me that Abbot Orzesius will be your father in Christ after me”. Abbot Orzesius tried to refuse this with many tears, but Fr. Patronios assured him that this was the advice of St. Bakhomios and also by God Himself to be in charge, so he accepted.

Abbot Orzesius could not handle the great responsibility and he used to consult St. Tadros about many matters. St. Tadros used to help him with all humility while fully denying himself and submitting himself to Abbot Orzesius. Eventually one of the Abbots in charge of monasteries started to rebel against Fr. Orzesius and disobeyed the general rules for all the monasteries. This matter troubled Fr. Orzesius and he was worried that this spirit of rebelling will spread in the other monasteries. Fr. Orzesius kept praying in tears for this matter and on one of the nights, the Lord revealed to him in a vision two beds; one of them was very old and almost falling apart and the other one is new and strong. He saw St. Bakhomios telling him, “don’t be troubled this old bed refers to you and the new one refers to Tadros, as he will be the new leader who can get the monasteries of community back to unity”.

In the morning Fr. Orzesius gathered all the Abbots of the different monasteries and told them that he is not able to lead the monasteries and it is his own will and the will of God to chose someone else. He firstly asked them if they had anyone in mind to choose but they left it to him to appoint the one whom he sees fitting. He told them that, “you all know that Tadros, the disciple of our father Bakhomios was always a leader and in charge of all matters during the life of our father Bakhomios”. All the Abbots agreed gladly for this matter and they called Tadros. When St. Tadros heard this, he begged them in tears to leave him away from it but when Fr Orzesius told him abbot the vision, St. Tadros accepted as he could not resist the will of God.

With the Grace of God and with St. Tadros’ very wise and sweet conduct, he was able to return all the monasteries of the Bakhomian community back to normal, exactly how it was in the life of St. Bakhomios. After his departure the leadership weakened again, the monasteries separated from each other and each monastery carried on its own full administration. The monasteries were located in desert areas away from different means of providence and because of the separation that happened; by the end of the fifth century most of the monks moved form the Bakhomian monasteries to other monasteries close by in different areas. Very soon after this, all the monasteries of St. Bakhomios became desolate and there were no monks carrying the name of St. Bakhomios anymore.

As we mentioned in the introduction, this status of the Bakhomian monasticism remained unknown to the people until the time of his Holiness Pope Shenouda III and the renovation of St. Bakhomios’ monastery in Edfo Upper Egypt.

29. A Model Of Some Miracles During The Renovation Of St. Bakhomios' Monastery At Edfo, Upper Egypt

“God is Glorified in His saints and is admired by all those who believe” (2Thess 1:10).

Since the beginning of the renovation of St. Bakhomios' monastery in Edfo which started on the 22nd Nov 1976, I have been an eyewitness to many miracles and many people told me about miracles for the great St. Bakhomios in their lives. For the limitation of this booklet, I will mention here a few miracles which I personally witnessed during the renovations of St. Bakhomios' monastery at Edfo.

(i) The bricks

The condition of the monastery before renovation was not promising with anything but with the surety of our Lords Grace, we always have in mind that *“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens us”*. Before renovation, there was nothing but only a very old Church; its walls were full of cracks and there was a very old room which was almost falling apart in which they used to make the Holy Bread for the Masses. The monastery was closed all year long and only opened during the four weeks before the birth of Christ and another four weeks before the Resurrection of our Lord. It was the custom that a priest from the villages around, comes with some people on the Saturday nights of those eight weeks. They stay there overnight and in the morning they pray the Mass and go. They used to use the Church for eating, sleeping, and in the morning they pray the Mass and go as there was no other place in the whole area except the Church. There were three deacons from the village in Edfo who were in charge of the needs of this old monastery. They agreed with a muslim person of the surrounding area to sell them ten thousand bricks for fifteen hundred Egyptian pounds. They started paying him the money but did not receive the bricks. When I was aware about it after arrival to stay in the monastery for renovation, I kept contacting this man begging him to send the bricks but he never did and he used to avoid meeting me. Once in the early morning, I went to his place knocked on his door to see him and ask about the bricks. He kept swearing and claiming that he will give us nothing. I went back to the monastery and there was an old icon for St. Bakhomios. I stood next to it and asked him to do something as it is his money that has been paid to that man. The next day at 6:00am I was shocked when I heard someone knocking on the door of the monastery in a very strange manner. When I opened, It was this very man and his face was expressing terrible fear and trouble and he said to me, “you will receive your bricks in three days”. I questioned what happened for this 180 degree change, he said to me, “at night after the day I left his place, St. Bakhomios appeared to him in a dream, stood on the top of his bed with a stick and was putting his stick on his neck saying to me, if you do not deliver the bricks to my monastery, you and your children will die”. The man expressed many apologies of his swearing and he sent the bricks on the third day.

(ii) The Scorpions

The area where the monastery was and especially after being left desolate for hundreds of years there were a lot of scorpions. I noticed that the scorpions do not touch those who are coming in faith to serve or do something but those who were coming with a different heart, those were hurt by the scorpions. The following stories are examples:

- (a) We started the renovations gradually and slowly according to financial state. Because the monastery was a bit far from the city Edfo, we used to store some food items which could stay long like onions. We had an amount of onions that were stored on the roof and we needed to move it to a store which we built. We learned from life in this area that when onion are stored in big amounts, it is a great ability for scorpions to be hidden in between. One of the schoolboys was carrying the onions from the roof down to the store using a basket. After he came down carrying the basket, he unloaded it and felt that there was something moving around his armpit area underneath his clothes, he thought it was some of the skin of the onion which went in (their custom for schoolboys was to be dressed in long large sleeve garments). After he unloaded, he pushed his arm down to drop the onion skins but he was shocked that a big scorpion fell from his arm and did not hurt him, while it is well know that just the scorpion gets in contact with any skin, it stings with it's poisoned tail on the spot and its sting is deadly and kills you in less than an hour. The more amazing thing is that when it dropped on the ground, it did not jump to attack as scorpions usually do but it was being still until we killed it.
- (b) While building some of the buildings, we used clay which was done in a special way replacing the cement. In this we make a big circle of the clay full of wheat straws, fill it with water and leave it for a full week. This is so that it becomes very sticky so we can build and stick them together. The majority of the laborers in this area were muslims. Once after the start of work with one hour, the labor who was appointed to be inside the circle of the clay to build for the builders cried out, "I have been stung by a scorpion" (it is also well known that the scorpions never come to a place near water). I quickly gave him an injection against the poison and put him to sleep. After two hours, I heard some very loud knocking on the door of my area. I went out and it was this muslim labor, just he saw me he kept bowing down saying, "please forgive me". I asked about what had happened and he answered, "on my way to the monastery in the morning, I was meaning to delay the work as I wasn't happy that the monastery is quickly growing. I was coming with the intention that after I start with one hour to claim sick and stop the work, as you can't hire any labor after the start of the working day, a big scorpion jumped out from the water and stung me. After you gave me the injection and I slept, St. Bakhomios appeared to me in the dream and said, "who tries to stumble to work in my place will suffer more than this".

(iii) The Cement

Later on the years we tried to use the cement in constructing a new building with bricks. It was a period of great shortage of cement in Egypt and at the end of one of the days, the bricklayer said to me "it is only one bag of cement left which will not help the laborers to work for more than one hour". He gave me two options:

- If he tells me to come and there is no cement, i have to pay him or
- It is better for him to go to work for another job that he doesn't waste the day.

I knew that there was no way to buy the cement as the day had already gone and also if he goes to the other job, it will be hard to bring him back because to finished what he started will take weeks. I felt in my heart to tell him to come the next day believing that God will do something. After he finished and left, I went to the Church of the monastery and prayed to God saying, "God You know that I am stuck and we have no refuge but You in different situations". I made my prayer through the intercessions of St. Bakhomios asking him to do something about it. One hour later, I heard the sound of a big truck parking in front of the monastery which was very strange as the road leading to the monastery was a narrow and a dirt track. The driver was asking about me and he said that a person called him to carry a load and as he went he took him to a big store and loaded five tones of cement and told him to deliver it to me in the morning in the monastery and also paid him the money. I asked him about the name of this person and he didn't know. When the bricklayer came the next day he couldn't believe his eyes on the big amount of cement.

(iv) The four wheel car

In the very beginning of renovations and after a while, it was a big effort to have a wooden carriage which was pulled by a donkey to help in the work. The monastery was located on the bottom of a very high mountain and the full area was very rocky. For us to extend and have new buildings it is very hard to cut the rock and level the area to build on it. The rocks would help us in some buildings with new extensions however it was difficult as those wooden donkey pulled cars cannot move in such an area. Once I was standing in the work area and in my heart I was thinking that if God helps us with a (Jeep) car which is very much like the four-wheel drive we could be able to achieve the work we need. After two hours a Coptic member came greeting me with a friend of his and he introduced this friend to me who was a muslim builder from a city about sixty kilometers far from the monastery. After guesting them this muslim builder said to me, "I want to talk to you in private". He said to me that he was stuck in a big problem in work and was complaining to his Christian friend who said to him, "ask St. Bakhomios to help you as his intercessions are powerful. At first he said to himself, "what would a man who died in the fourth century do to me" and as the problem was getting worse, he started to pray in his heart, seeking the help of St. Bakhomios. In one week the problem was solved in a way he didn't expect and then he continued saying, "I had a jeep car which I use in my work, I'm willing to give it to the monastery to help in your work and please always remember me in your prayers".

29. Some Sayings Of St. Bakhomios

1. This is the work of the devil to firstly make the person empty with the grace of God by keeping him/her away from the spiritual food. This will result in the Holy Spirit being inside the person but not working with him/her. Accordingly, the devil will have authority over the body of that person and make him/her move with lustful desires, overwhelming his/her body like the fire over some dry straw. When the devil

is sure that this person is continuously in his/her spiritual slackness and not trying to help him/herself, he keeps him/her dragging like this and suddenly attacks him/her and makes him/her fall in terrible sins.

My children, do your utmost in your struggle to flee the lustful desires and work hard to achieve the purity of heart.

2. In St. Paul's letter to the Hebrews he said, "*we have become partners with Christ in His sufferings*" (3:14) and also said, "*let us put the utmost effort to achieve our hope*" (10:23). He continued saying, "*my wish is that everyone of you shows the greatest struggle up to the end to reach our hope*" (6:11).

The person who struggles for Heaven needs to firstly practice controlling his/her stomach. It is obvious that the desires of the stomach is the worst of all desires as the person whose stomach is always full, it becomes a field for all other lusts and desires. The full stomach makes the body heavy as well as lazy and not able to practice different spiritual tasks. Continuous laziness in such a person's life makes his/her mind and senses a laboratory for all-bad thoughts, intentions and acts.

3. We should always study the Word of God, keep our continuous prayers while feeding our souls continuously with the grace of the Holy sacraments and walking all the time under spiritual guidance. The person who is empty from this grace, his/her body will become like a desolate house which eventually becomes full of scorpions, snakes and different such things. By this I mean that those hurtful creatures are symbols to the different sins in which it cannot dwell in the persons body, unless it is empty from the grace of God.
4. Make for yourself a very strong watchful guard on the words which come out from your mouth. We know that we'll give an account for every single word which comes from our mouth, even if it were an idle word as the Lord taught us. The loose mouth with much talking is an open gate to the evil birds to devour the seeds of the Word of God that is sown in his/her heart. Every time you open your mouth to talk, remember that you will stand before the Just Judge to give an account for what you are saying.
5. "*Whoever secretly slanders his neighbour, him I will destroy*"; *the one who has a haughty look and a proud heart, him I will not endure*" (Psalm 101:5). We should be cautious not only from the words which we say but also about what we hear from others such as gossiping about others. When we hear bad gossip about others, even if we did not answer back with words sharing with them; but it occurs that we judge them within ourselves which means that we talk badly about them inside ourselves. That is what the prophet means by "he who secretly slander his neighbour".

We should be very careful from what we say and hear because everything will be brought openly to judgement in the last day as the Lord said, "*what you say in the ear in the inner places will be said allowed on the house tops*".

6. Do not let your days pass with the same routine, like yesterday will be today and tomorrow and as last year passed, will be this year also. Until when you will be standing still without any growing up? Awake and wake your heart, push your body to stand strong in struggling before it makes you standing speechless in the last day. On that day when you are confronted with your deeds, you will never be able to give an answer and you will badly regret the days that you wasted in your life on earth. My son/daughter stand up strongly like an honest soldier in the war and no matter what type of trials, temptations, troubles or afflictions confront you in your struggle, do not loose heart for it is written in the psalm, *“I will fear no evil for You are with me”* and also written *“even if I walk in the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear nothing for You are with me”*. Be sure that the Lord is always there to support you but unless the Lord sees your steadfastness heart and sincere effort, He will never stretch His hand to help you achieve your salvation.
7. One of the monks asked St. Bakhomios, “we know that you have seen many visions, can you please tell us any one of them so that we benefit from it?” St. Bakhomios answered, “a sinful person like me will not be given any visions; but if you want to visualise a Divine vision that will benefit you, I’ll tell you about it:
 - If you find a real humble person who was able to submit him/herself to the true humility of our Lord Jesus Christ; this is the greatest vision you can see. In such a person you can see God Himself; as when the Lord God appeared to us to save us, He humbled Himself fully and took the shape of the servant emptying Himself from His Glory to fulfill His love for us and redeem us.
8. If you manage it to be pure in all things, but there is still enmity between you and your brethren, you’re still a stranger from God. God is love and who cannot love his/her brethren is not of God as St. John the beloved and evangelist wrote in his epistle. We have been instructed to “follow the peace and holiness without which no one can visualise God”. This means that unless we have peace with others, the holiness we show in different ways will be just dry practices and not rooted in the true vine.
9. If someone attacks you by any hurt or insultation, do not answer him/her back and do not be angry with him/her. It is better to be upset for his/her sake because the devil found a place in him/her making him/her do so. At this moment if you are a real person of God, you should pray for him/her that God helps him/her to repent and not loose his/her salvation.
10. My son/daughter make your utmost to flee from the vainglory of people. When our mother eve was deceived by the devil to accept the desire to be like God, she fell and we all had fallen after her. Be sure that he/she who seeks the glory of people will be deprived from the glory of God. The Lord said, “if you are praised by men, you have lost your reward in Heaven”. Our fathers St. Paul and Barnabus when the people praised them, they tore their clothes; and St. Peter and John the apostles when they were insulted and whipped, rejoiced as they have been counted worthy to suffer for His Names sake.

