

The Prologue - November 9/22, 2018

Abba John the Dwarf

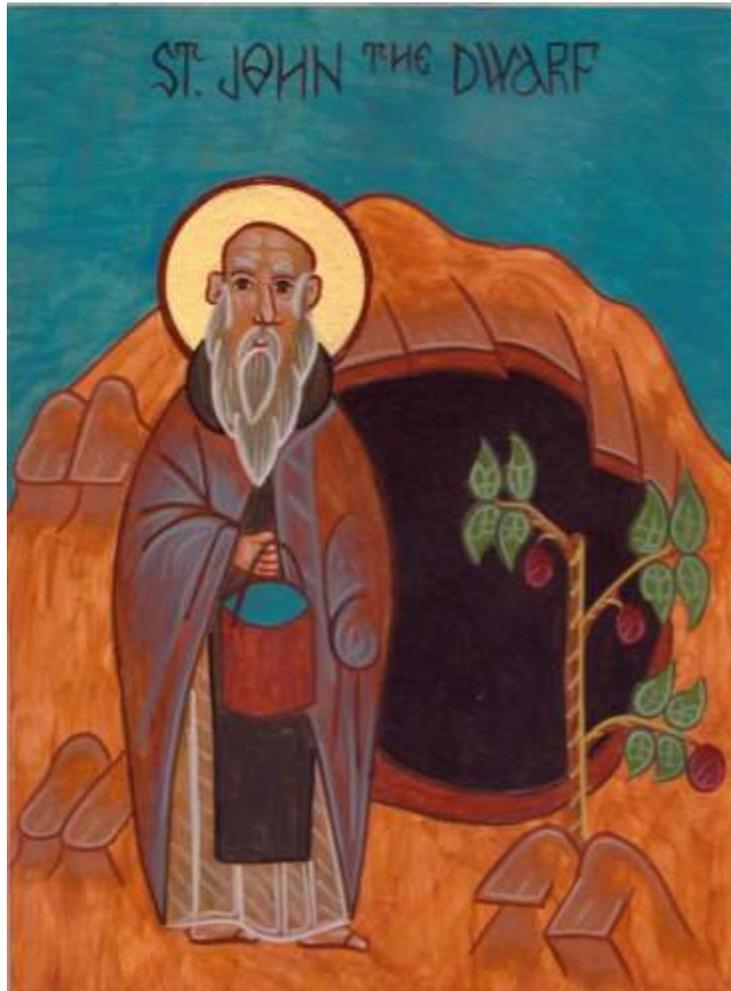
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Read the prologue every day.



Summary for November 9.

Today is also the feast day St Nectarios of Pentapolis, who is highly feasted and all the churches, but Bishop Nikolai's Prologue does not include him. It may have been that he wrote his Prologue before his feast day was added to the calendar of the saints. Glory be to God that any book written that tries to catalog the saints is out of date the moment it is printed.

The major entry is about **Abba John the Dwarf**. There is a short description of his life, and a wonderful story about him watering a dry stick. His sayings are so wonderful that many of them, including the story about the dry stick, are included below.

Blessed Nikolai also wrote a small sermon about the famous passage from Ephesians “by grace ye are saved (through faith)”. He used in illustration about a person who fell into a well and was saved by the King’s son. The illustration shows very clearly that if the child who was in the well had not grabbed the rope that was let down to save him, he would not have been saved. He had no ability to save himself, and the rope in the story signifies the grace of God, and the boy grabbing onto the rope signifies that we must respond to God’s grace. Read it for yourself to benefit your soul. We cannot be saved by assuming that God’s grace will save us. We are saved by responding to God’s grace.

Selected sayings of Abba John the Dwarf

There are many more sayings, but all of these are among my favorites. Pay particular in attention to the one about obedience (#1). We can all improve.

Also pay attention to #3, which gives us all the reason we need to fast.

#10 is very useful for the soul. Learn the skill of seeing God in all things. Learn how to think of things spiritually.

#13 probably sounds very strange to most modern people. Most of us think that our life is going well when there are not cares and difficulties. This is not a Christian idea. Many of my flock in prison struggles against various sins and often feels very demoralized about them. When I try to console them, the words of Abba John influence me greatly. We may fall again and again, but if we are struggling to get up, God is with us. Our falling helps us to stay humble. The proud man is capable of any evil.

1. It was said of Abba John the Dwarf that he withdrew and lived in the desert at Scetis with an old man of Thebes. His Abba, taking a piece of dry wood, planted it and said to him, 'Water it every day with a bottle of water, until it bears fruit.' Now the water was so far away that he had to leave in the evening and return the following morning. At the end of three years the wood came to life and bore fruit. Then the old man took some of the fruit and carried it to the church saying to the brethren, 'Take and eat the fruit of obedience.'

One of my favorite monastic stories of all time is #40, where Abba John, because of his great love, put himself in, frankly, a compromising position in order to save a woman who had previously been pious and become a prostitute. We learn from Abba John that we must love and risk things because of love. We learn from the blessed Paesia that God will receive our repentance no matter what we have done. This may seem obvious, but I assure you I have encountered many people that have struggled very much to believe that God would receive their repentance. He will! We must only try!

3. Abba John the Dwarf said, 'If a king wanted to take possession of his enemy's city, he would begin by cutting off the water and the food and so his enemies, dying of hunger, would submit to him. It is the same with the passions of the flesh: if a man goes about fasting and hungry the enemies of his soul grow weak.'

10. Some brethren came one day to test him to see whether he would let his thoughts get dissipated and speak of the things of this world. They said to him, 'We give thanks to God that this year there has been much rain and the palm trees have been able to drink, and their shoots have grown, and the brethren have found manual work.' Abba John said to them, 'So it is when the Holy Spirit descends into the hearts of men; they are renewed and they put forth leaves in the fear of God.'

13. Abba Poemen said of Abba John the Dwarf that he had prayed God to take his passions away from him so that he might become free from care. He went and told an old man this: 'I find myself in peace, without an enemy,' he said. The old man said to him, 'Go, beseech God to stir up warfare so that you may regain the affliction and humility that you used to have, for it is

by warfare that the soul makes progress.' So, he besought God and when warfare came, he no longer prayed that it might be taken away, but said, 'Lord, give me strength for the fight.'

16. The old man also said this to a certain brother about the soul which wishes to be converted, 'There was in a city a courtesan who had many lovers. One of the governors approached her, saying, "Promise me you will be good, and I will marry you." She promised this and he took her and brought her to his house. Her lovers, John the Dwarf seeking her again, said to one another, "That lord has taken her with him to his house, so if we go to his house and he learns of it, he will condemn us. But let us go to the back, and whistle to her. Then, when she recognizes the sound of the whistle, she will come down to us; as for us, we shall be unassailable." When she heard the whistle, the woman stopped her ears and withdrew to the inner chamber and shut the doors.' The old man said that this courtesan is our soul, that her lovers are the passions and other men; that the lord is Christ; that the inner chamber is the eternal dwelling; those who whistle are the evil demons, but the soul always takes refuge in the Lord.

20. Abba John said, 'Who sold Joseph?' A brother replied saying, 'It was his brethren.' The old man said to him, 'No, it was his humility which sold him, because he could have said, "I am their brother" and have objected, but, because he kept silence, he sold himself by his humility. It is also his humility which set him up as chief in Egypt.'

34. Abba John said, 'I think it best that a man should have a little bit of all the virtues. Therefore, get up early every day and acquire the beginning of every virtue and every commandment of God. Use great patience, with fear and long-suffering, in the love of God, with all the fervor of your soul and body. Exercise great humility, bear with interior distress; be vigilant and pray often with reverence and groaning, with purity of speech and control of your eyes. When you are despised do not get angry; be at peace, and do not render evil for evil. Do not pay attention to the faults of others, and do not try to compare yourself with others, knowing you are less than every created thing. Renounce everything material and that which is of the flesh. Live by the cross, in warfare, in poverty of spirit, in voluntary spiritual asceticism, in fasting, penitence and tears, in discernment, in purity of soul, taking hold of that which is good. Do your work in peace. Persevere in keeping vigil, in hunger and thirst, in cold and nakedness, and in sufferings. Shut yourself in a tomb as though you were already dead, so that at all times you will think death is near.'

40. What follows was said about Abba John. The parents of a young girl died, and she was left an orphan; she was called Paesia. She decided to make her house a hospice, for the use of the Fathers of Scetis. So, for a long time she gave hospitality and served the Fathers. But in the course of time, her resources were exhausted and she began to be in want. Some wicked men came to see her and turned her aside from her aim. She began to live an evil life, to the point of becoming a prostitute.

The Fathers, learning this, were deeply grieved, and calling Abba John the Dwarf said to him, 'We have learnt that this sister is living an evil life. While she could, she gave us charity, so now it is our turn to offer her charity and to go to her assistance. Go to see her then, and according to the wisdom which God has given you, put things right for her.' So, Abba John went to her, and said to the old door-keeper, 'Tell your mistress I am here.' But she sent him away saying, 'From the beginning you have eaten her goods, and see how poor she is now.' Abba John said to her, 'Tell her, I have something which will be very helpful to her.' The door-keeper's children, mocking him, said to him, 'What have you to give her, that makes you want to meet her?' He replied, 'How do you know what I am going to give her?' The old woman went up and spoke to her mistress about him. Paesia said to her, 'These monks are always going about in the region of the Red Sea and finding pearls.' Then she got ready and said to the door-keeper, 'Please bring him to me.'

As he was coming up, she prepared for him and lay down on the bed. Abba John entered and sat down beside her. Looking into her eyes, he said to her, 'What have you got against Jesus that you behave like this?' When she heard this, she became completely rigid. Then Abba John bent his head and began to weep copiously. She asked him, 'Abba, why are you crying?' He raised his head, then lowered it again, weeping, and said to her, 'I see Satan playing in your face, how should I not weep?' Hearing this, she said to him, 'Abba, is it possible to repent?' He replied 'Yes.' She said, 'Take me wherever you wish.'

'Let us go,' he said and she got up to go with him. Abba John noticed that she did not make any arrangements with regard to her house; he said nothing, but he was surprised.

When they reached the desert, the evening drew on. He, making a little pillow with the sand, and marking it with the sign of the cross, said to her, 'Sleep here.' Then, a little further on, he did the same for himself, said his prayers, and lay down. Waking in the middle of the night, he saw a shining path reaching from heaven to her, and he saw the angels of God bearing away her soul. So, he got up and went to touch her feet. When he saw that she was dead he threw himself face downwards on the ground, praying to God. He heard this: 'One single hour of repentance has brought her more than the penitence of many who persevere without showing such fervor in repentance.'

Use the link to the prologue entry for today, and read with humility and longing and learn something that will make you better today: : <http://westserbdio.org/en/prologue/688-november-9?tmpl=component&print=1&page=>

You can read any selection from the Prologue by going to the following link, and entering the date. Please keep in mind that the dates are the church calendar. Don't pay attention to the day that the calendar that allows you to select the date shows. If you follow the new calendar, just enter the civil date that you're interested in. If you follow the old calendar, you need to be able to do math if you know the civil (Joe's garage calendar) date. You must subtract 13 days from that date get the church calendar date.

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