



St. John the Dwarf

and the Life of Obedience



01.22.12

Points of Discussion

- ▶ The life of St. John the Dwarf
- ▶ His Virtues
- ▶ The life of obedience



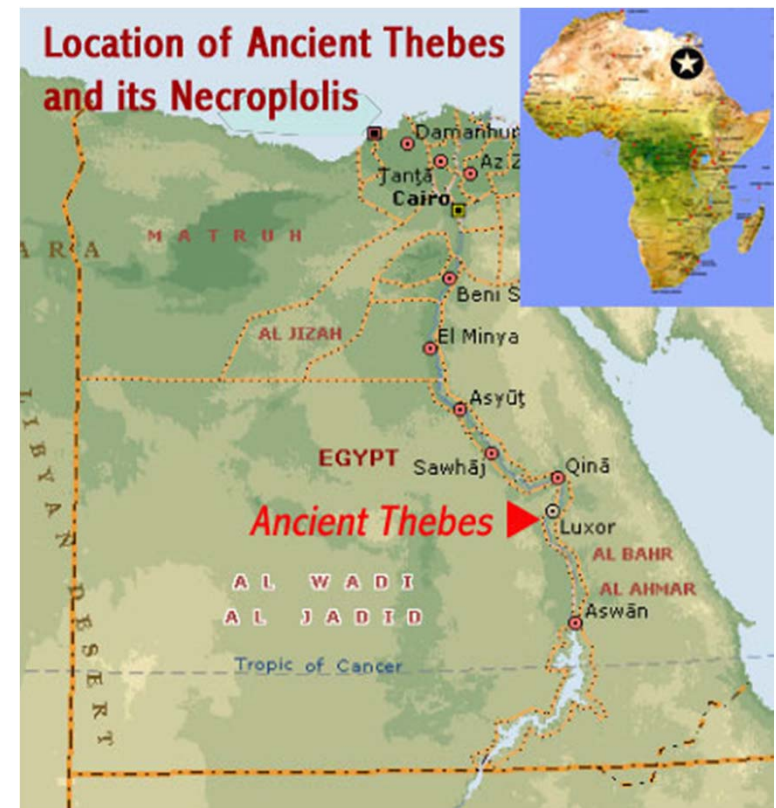
The Life of St. John the Dwarf

- ▶ What's his name?
 - ▶ “Kolobos” = little
 - ▶ The Dwarf
 - ▶ The Short
- ▶ His is one of the most eminent dwellers in Scete.
- ▶ He is mentioned in the Commemoration of Saints and the hymn Pinishti. (Divine Liturgy of St. Basil)
- ▶ Feast Day: Baba 20/October 30th



Life of St. John the Dwarf

- ▶ Born around 339AD
- ▶ Theban region in Upper Egypt (modern day Luxor)
- ▶ His family was poor
- ▶ He had the desire for monastic life at a very young age
- ▶ There were no established monasteries
- ▶ All the monks were hermits
- ▶ “They wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth” (Heb. 11:38)



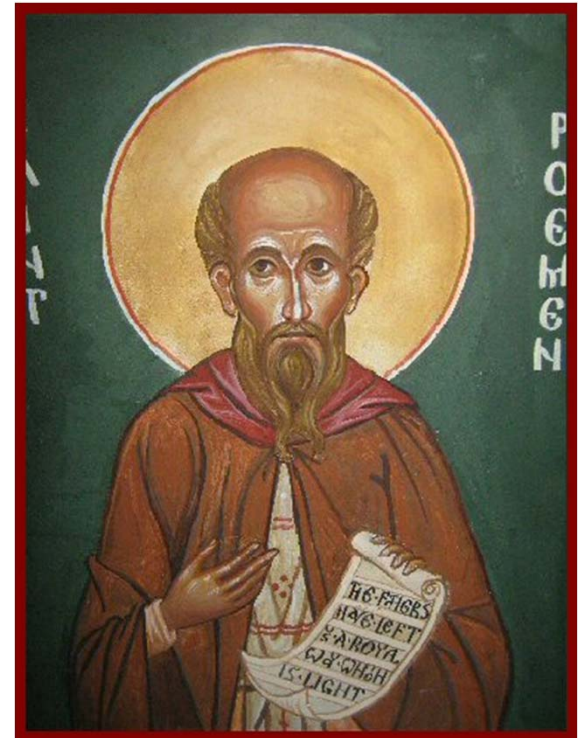
Life of St. John the Dwarf

- ▶ He went to the desert of Scete (Natroun Valley) when he was 8 years old
 - ▶ He desired to be the disciple of Abba Poemen
 - ▶ Who was also the teacher of St. Pishoy
 - ▶ Abba Poemen wasn't accustomed to accepting monks hastily
 - ▶ The Test:
 - ▶ It was said of Abba John the Dwarf, that one day he said to his elder brother, **"I should like to be free of all care, like the angels who do not work, but ceaselessly offer worship to God."** So he took off his cloak and went away into the desert. After a week he came back to his brother. When he knocked on the door, he heard his brother say, before he opened it, **"Who are you?"** He said, **"I am John, your brother."** But he replied, **"John has become an angel, and henceforth he is no longer among men."** Then the other begged him saying, **"It is I."** However, his brother did not let him in, but left him there in distress until morning. Then, opening the door, he said to him, **"You are a man and you must once again work in order to eat."** Then John made a prostration before him, saying, **"Forgive me."**
 - ▶ Abba Poemen attempted to dissuade him
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Life of St. John the Dwarf

- ▶ Abba Poemen eventually agreed after divine revelation
 - ▶ He prayed over the monastic garb for 3 days while fasting and praying
 - ▶ He saw an angel making the sign of the cross over his garb
- ▶ Another test:
 - ▶ Abba Poemen expelled him from his cell
 - ▶ St. John stayed outside of his cell for 7 days
 - ▶ Each day Abba Poemen would strike him with a palm branch
 - ▶ St. John replied, “I have sinned.”
 - ▶ [Day 7] Abba Poemen saw 7 angels with 7 crowns placing them on his head



Life of St. John the Dwarf

► An Obedient Disciple

- One day Abba Poemen found a piece of dry wood and gave it to St. John and said to him, "**Take this wood, plant and water it.**" St. John obeyed and went on watering it **twice a day** even though the water was about **12 miles** from where they lived. After **three years**, that piece of wood sprouted and grew into a fruitful tree. Abba Poemen took some of that fruit and went around to all the elder monks saying, "**Take, eat from the fruit of obedience.**"



Life of St. John the Dwarf

▶ As a teacher and elder

- ▶ Abba Poemen was sick for 12 years, in which St. John served him tirelessly
- ▶ His farewell message to his disciples: “Take him and keep him, for he is an angel of God, not a man.”
- ▶ St. John’s older brother also adopted the monastic life
- ▶ St. Arsenius was among many saints under his care

▶ As a priest

- ▶ He was ordained by Pope Theophilus
- ▶ He was given the gift of knowing those who were worthy to partake of the holy Eucharist.



Life of St. John the Dwarf

▶ His relocation

- ▶ Around 395AD the barbarians attacked the desert of Scete forcing him to relocate
- ▶ Why? Was he scared?
 - ▶ No, but he feared that the barbarians would slay him and perish forever.
- ▶ He fled to the mountain of St. Anthony (Red Sea)
- ▶ He departed there
- ▶ Relics are in St. Macarius Monastery



His Virtues: Humility

- ▶ Some old men were entertaining themselves at Scetis by having a meal together; amongst them was Abba John. A **venerable priest got up to offer drink**, but nobody accepted any from him, except John the Dwarf. They were surprised and said to him, **'How is it that you, the youngest, dared to let yourself be served by the priest?'** Then he said to them, **'When I get up to offer drink, I am glad when everyone accepts it, since I am receiving my reward; that is the reason, then, that I accepted it, so that he also might gain his reward and not be grieved by seeing that no-one would accept anything from him.'** When they heard -this, they were all filled with wonder and edification at his discretion.
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His Virtues: Humility

- ▶ One day when he was sitting in front of the church, the brethren were consulting him about their thoughts. One of the old men who saw it **became a prey to jealousy** and said to him, '**John, your vessel is full of poison.**' Abba John said to him, '**That is very true, Abba; and you have said that when you only see the outside, but if you were able to see the inside, too, what would you say then?**'



His Virtues: Servant & Shepherd

- ▶ Abba John the Dwarf said, “A house is not built by beginning at the top and working down. You must begin with the foundations in order to reach the top.” They said to him, “What does this saying mean?” He said, “**The foundation is our neighbor**, whom we must win, and that is the place to begin. **For all the commandments of Christ depend on this one.**”



His Virtues: Servant & Shepherd

▶ A Lost Sheep: Paesia the Harlot

- ▶ The girl was left an orphan at a young age
- ▶ She made her house a hospital for the use of the Fathers of Scetis
- ▶ Her service and hospitality to them were exemplary
- ▶ In time, her resources dwindled and she herself was in need
- ▶ Some wicked men visited her and enticed her to live a wicked life – harlotry
- ▶ When the Fathers were informed of this they informed St. John the Short saying, “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 them, and according to the wisdom which God has given you, put things right for her.”



His Virtues: Servant & Shepherd

▶ A Lost Sheep: Paesia the Harlot

- ▶ St. John went to her house
- ▶ He told the old doorkeeper, “Tell your mistress I am here.”
- ▶ She responded saying, “From the beginning you have eaten her goods, and see how poor she is now.”
- ▶ St. John said, “Tell her I have something which will be very helpful to her.”
- ▶ The doorkeeper’s children mocked him
- ▶ Paeisa said to the doorkeeper, “These monks are always going about in the region of the Red Sea and finding pearls.”
- ▶ She then prepared the bed for him and laid in it.
- ▶ He entered, sat next to her, looked into her eyes and said, “What have you got against Jesus that you behave like this?”
- ▶ St. John then lowered his head and wept bitterly for her



His Virtues: Servant & Shepherd

- ▶ **A Lost Sheep: Paesia the Harlot**
 - ▶ [Paesia] “Why are you crying?”
 - ▶ [St. John] “I see Satan playing in your face, how should I not weep?”
 - ▶ [Paesia] “Is it possible to repent?”
 - ▶ [St. John] “Yes, let’s go.”
 - ▶ [Paesia] “Take me where ever you wish.”
 - ▶ She then arose and went with him but did not make any arrangement in her home.
 - ▶ They made it to the desert as the sun set
 - ▶ He made a pillow of sand for her and one for himself further away.
 - ▶ In the middle of night he awake and saw a shinning path reaching from heaven to her, and he saw the angels of God carrying away her soul.
 - ▶ He went to her to verify, and wept for her
 - ▶ 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.”



His Virtues: Consecration of the Mind

- ▶ He believed that the perfect monk consists in keeping to his cell, watching over himself, and having God continually present with him.
 - ▶ The longer quietness prevails, the weaker the pains of lust became, and the healthier the mind becomes until it reaches peace.
 - ▶ One day a brother came to buy the baskets that he made. The brother asked him to get them for him, but continually forgot by the time he entered his cell again. Finally, after 3 attempts he said, “If you want the baskets, come in and take them yourself.”
 - ▶ There was a similar story involving a camel-driver who wanted to pick up some goods. He repeatedly forgot. Then after the third time he repeated, “Weaving-camel; weaving-camel...”
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Life of Obedience: Introduction

- ▶ **OT terminology:**

- ▶ Hebrew verbs which literally mean: to listen, to hear, to keep, to guard, to observe, and to live out.

- ▶ **NT terminology:**

- ▶ Greek verbs which mean: “to submit” and “to comply”

- ▶ **Definition:**

- ▶ the action or practice of obeying; the fact or character of being obedient; submission to the rule or authority of another; compliance with or performance of a command, law, or the like; the action of doing what one is bidden.
 - ▶ In the passive sense: the subject allows himself to be treated according to the will of another; or in which he suffers without remonstrance or resistance.



Life of Obedience: What Obedience is Not

- ▶ Obedience is not simply doing good, obeying moral instinct, or religious laws
 - ▶ Christian objective is not maintaining moral goodness. Traditions, or philanthropic services
 - ▶ Ex: Joining Pro-Life movement; Civil War soldiers; Fasting
 - ▶ *“Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’” (Matthews 7:22-23)*
- ▶ Christian obedience will result in “good”
 - ▶ “As long as we are thinking that way, one or the other of two results is likely to follow. Either **we give up trying to be good**, or else we become **very unhappy** indeed... In the end, you will either give up trying to be good, or else become one of those people who, as they say, **“live for others”** but always in a discontented, grumbling way – **always wondering why the others do not notice it more and always making a martyr of yourself.**” – C.S. Lewis



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

- ▶ Obeying the God of Scripture
- ▶ However, in order to obey we must hear
 - ▶ How do I discern the voice of God?
 - ▶ How do I know that God is speaking to me?
 - ▶ Is it a creation of my own disturbed mind?
- ▶ How to hear God's voice?
 - ▶ God communicated in various ways – Scripture, nature, dreams, circumstances, his body, the church, men of God, needs, visions, etc.
 - ▶ We need to be alert and sensitive



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

- ▶ We must consider the content of what God may speak
- ▶ We live in the post-Pentecostal period
 - ▶ “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.” (Jn. 14:26)
 - ▶ “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds.” (Heb. 1:1,2)
- ▶ Christ established the Church on the day of Pentecost
- ▶ It took nearly 350 years for the Church to identify the books and teaching that were contrary to that of Christ’s
- ▶ This lead to the canonization of the Bible – to protect the Church
- ▶ We need to test content of message for its coherence in purpose and goal.
 - ▶ “Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” (1 Jn. 4:1)



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

- ▶ Obedience springs from faith
 - ▶ Yes, it is a human decision but also caused by God
 - ▶ “Through Him **we have received** grace and apostleship for **obedience to the faith** among all nations for His name...” (Rom. 1:5)
 - ▶ Without faith it is difficult to obey God absolutely
 - ▶ Absolute obedience emerges from absolute faith
 - ▶ “By faith Abraham **obeyed** when **he was called** to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going.” (Heb. 11:8)
 - ▶ “Likewise, when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, ‘Go up and possess the land which I have given you,’ then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and **you did not believe Him nor obey His voice.**” (Deut. 9:23)
 - ▶ “Therefore, my beloved, as you have **always obeyed**, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for **it is God who works in you both to will and to do** for His good pleasure.” (Phil. 2:12-13)



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

▶ Being a Slave of God

- ▶ “Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, **you are that one's slaves whom you obey**, whether of sin leading to death, or of **obedience leading to righteousness**? But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. What fruit did you have then in the things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of those things is death. **But now having been set free from sin, and having become slaves of God**, you have your fruit to holiness, and the end, everlasting life. For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Rom. 6:16-23)

▶ We are not servants but slaves purchased by the precious blood of Christ

- ▶ “For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body.” (1 Cor. 6:20)



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

▶ Being a Slave of God

- ▶ “Christ says “Give me All. I don’t want so much of your time and so much of your money and so much of your work: I want You. I have not come to torment your natural self, but to kill it. No half-measures are any good. I don’t want to cut off a branch here and a branch there, I want to have the whole tree down. I don’t want to drill the tooth, or crown it, or stop it, but to have it out. Hand over the whole natural self, all the desires which you think innocent as well as the ones you think wicked – the whole outfit. I will give you a new self instead. In fact, I will give you Myself: my own will shall become yours.” – C.S. Lewis



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

▶ Obedience is Absolute Compliance

▶ Partial obedience

- ▶ changing the content of instructions
- ▶ Inconsistent loyalty

▶ God cannot be flattered

- ▶ But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than **sacrifice**, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

▶ Partial obedience is an attempt to escape responsibility

- ▶ "But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to **sacrifice** them to the LORD your God at Gilgal." (1 Samuel 15:20-21)



Life of Obedience: What Obedience Is

▶ Obedience is Absolute Compliance

- ▶ We may say that some is better than none
- ▶ This originate from a loss of awe and reverence for God
- ▶ But Saul and the army spared Agag and the **best** of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs-- **everything that was good**. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. (1 Sam. 15:9)
- ▶ Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was **afraid of the people and so I gave in to them.**(1 Sam.15:24)
- ▶ Saul replied, "I have sinned. But **please honor me before the elders of my people** and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." (1Sam.15: 30)



Life of Obedience: Why Obedience?

▶ Our ultimate occupation

- ▶ “The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And **to Him shall be the obedience of the people (nations).**” (Gen. 49:10)
- ▶ “...but now made manifest, and by the prophetic Scriptures **made known to all nations**, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, **for obedience to the faith...**” (Rom. 16:26)

▶ The purpose of our selection

- ▶ “...elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, in sanctification of the Spirit, **for obedience** and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace be multiplied.” (1 Pet. 1:2)



Life of Obedience: Why Obedience?

▶ Disobedience is serious

- ▶ “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.” (Matt. 7:21)
- ▶ “...and being ready to punish all disobedience when your obedience is fulfilled.” (2 Cor. 10:6)
- ▶ “Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.” (Eph. 5:6)



Life of Obedience: Why Obedience?

- ▶ Obedience is rewarding
 - ▶ “Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine.” (Exo. 19:5)
 - ▶ Obedience builds obedience
 - ▶ Disobedience = shame and guilt
 - ▶ Obedience = joy and peace
 - ▶ “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing.” (1 Tim. 4:7-8)



Life of Obedience: Conclusion

- ▶ Obedience is NOT simply “doing good”
- ▶ Obedience is obeying God
- ▶ Obedience springs from faith
- ▶ Obedience is voluntary slavery
- ▶ Obedience is absolute compliance
- ▶ Why do we obey?
 - ▶ Our occupation in heaven
 - ▶ Our purpose
 - ▶ Disobedient will be judged
 - ▶ Obedience will be rewarded



