



■ On the occasion of the commemoration of St. Eugene and his daughter, St. Mary (February 12)

St. Mary of Bithynia*

The life of Eugene and his daughter Mary

by St. Symeon Metaphrastes

(Sixth Century)

AMAN in Bithynia, by the name of Eugene, had a wife who bore an only daughter, whom they named Mary. Upon the death of Mary's mother, her father raised her through very methodical teaching and a holy life. When the girl had grown up, her father told her:

"Here, my child, I leave all of my possessions in your hands I am departing for a monastery to save my soul."

His daughter answered:

"Father, you wish to save your own soul and leave mine to be lost? Do you not know that the Lord says: 'The good shepherd sacrifices his life for his sheep'? And elsewhere: 'He who saves a soul shall be as the one who created it'?"

Hearing her say such things, and seeing her lamenting and crying, her father said to her:

"My child, what can I do for you, since I wish to enter a monastery? And how is it possible for you to remain with me? For the Devil uses you women to vex and trouble the servants of God."

She replied:

"No, Father, I will not enter the monastery in the way that you imagine, but will cut my hair and dress myself in men's clothing; this is how I will come with you."

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WHEN her father had distributed all of his possessions to the poor and

cut Mary's hair and dressed her in men's clothing, he named her "Marinos" and instructed her with these words:

"Be careful, my child, to watch yourself; for you will be passing through fire. Keep yourself pure by the Grace of Christ, that we might fulfill our promise."

Taking her with him, he entered a *cœnobion*, where his daughter progressed day by day in every virtue and great asceticism. Many of the brothers thought she was a eunuch, since she was beardless and had a high-pitched voice, whereas others supposed that this was the result of great temperance; for she only ate every two days. Now, it so happened that her father died, whereat she added obedience to her asceticism, that she might receive a charism from God against the demons. Thus, by the touch of her hand all of the infirm were immediately healed.

There were forty spiritual men along with her in the *cœnobion*, and each month four of the brothers were sent out to take care of the affairs of the monastery, since they also provided for a number of anchorites. The journey being lengthy, the brothers who came and went would stop to rest at an inn that lay along the way. The innkeeper attended to them and showed them gracious hospitality.

* * *

ONE day, then, the Abbot called Abba Marinos and said to him:

"Brother, I am well acquainted with your entire life and your great obedience; that is, that you are perfect in everything. So, I have decided that you should go out in service of the monastery, since the brothers are grieved that you do not. If you do this, you will receive an even greater reward from our God, Who loves mankind."

Hearing these words, Marinos fell at his feet and said:

"Give me your blessing, Father, and wherever you direct me, I shall go."

When Abba Marinos went one day with the other three brothers on monastery business and stopped to rest at the inn, it so happened that a certain soldier seduced the innkeeper's daughter, and she conceived. The soldier told her:

"If this becomes known to your father, tell him: 'It was the young monk from the cœnobion—the handsome one, named Marinos—who slept with me.'"

And, having given her compensation for dishonoring her, he took to the road and left. When, after a few days, her father became aware of her condition, he asked: "Who did this to you?" And she threw the blame on

Marinos.

* * *

TAKING his daughter, the innkeeper arrived at the monastery, shouting:

“Where is that deceiver, whom they call a Christian?”

The *apokrisarios* came to see him and asked:

“Why are you shouting, my brother?”

And he replied:

“I am shouting because I curse the hour I encountered you. May I never see another monk again or have anything to do with them.”

He said the same to the Abbot:

“Father, my one and only daughter, on whom I hoped to depend in my old age—well, look and see what that Marinos, whom you call a Christian, has gone and done to her.”

The Abbot replied:

“What can I do for you, brother, since he is not here? When he returns, however, there remains nothing for me to do but to expel him from the monastery.”

When Abba Marinos arrived with the three other brothers, the Abbot said to him:

“Is this your conduct and your asceticism, that while staying at the inn you seduce the innkeeper’s daughter, and then he comes here and makes a scene before the laypeople?”

Hearing these words, Marinos dropped to his feet, saying:

“Forgive me, Father, for the Lord’s sake; for I have erred, being human.”

The Abbot flared up in anger and immediately threw him out of the monastery.

* * *

MARINOS went out and sat in the open air, valiantly enduring the cold and the heat. Those who entered and exited asked him: *“Why are you sitting here?”*

And he would answer: *“They expelled me from the monastery because I committed fornication.”*

When the innkeeper’s daughter gave birth to a son, the innkeeper took it in his hands and went to the monastery. Finding Marinos sitting outside of the gate, he threw the baby at his feet and said: *“Here is the product of your sin. Take it.”*

And he departed forthwith. Taking up the child, Marinos felt pity for

it, and said:

“As for me, I am paying for my sins. But why should this hapless child die with me?”

He thus began to ask for milk from the shepherds and to feed it as though he were its father. And as if this distraction were not enough, the crying and wailing baby would soil its clothes.

After three years, when the brothers had seen his great affliction and patience, they went to the Abbot and said:

“He has been punished enough, since he confesses his error before everyone.”

Since the Abbot could not be persuaded to take him back, the brothers said to him:

“If you do not receive him back, we will also leave the monastery. How can we ask forgiveness for our daily sins while he has been sitting outside for three years?”

* * *

THE Abbot then accepted him back, saying:

“I accept you back on account of the brothers’ love, though you are the least of all.”

And Marinos made a prostration to him, saying:

“It is more than enough for me, Father, just to live under your roof.”

So the Abbot gave him the most degrading chores, which he performed with zeal, wearing himself out in the process. And all the while he had the child behind him, hollering and clamoring for food. When the child grew up, having been reared with great virtue, he was accounted worthy of receiving the monastic *schema*.

* * *

ONE day, the Abbot asked the brothers:

“Where is Brother Marinos? I have not seen him at the services for three days, though he is always the first to arrive. Go to his cell and see if he has fallen ill.”

They went and found that he had died. When they had informed the Abbot of this, he replied:

“I wonder, how did his wretched soul depart? What defense can he have made for himself?”

He instructed that Marinos be buried. When they went to wash him and discovered that he was a woman, they all cried out *“Lord have mercy!”*

The Abbot asked: *“What has come over you?”*

They replied: *“Brother Marinos was a woman.”*

Entering the cell, the Abbot dropped down with his head on the ground, weeping and saying:

“I will remain here, at his holy feet, until I die, if I do not receive forgiveness.”

And a voice said to him:

“If you had acted in knowledge, your sin would not be forgiven. But since you acted in ignorance, it will be forgiven you.”

* * *

WHEN the Abbot stood up, he called for the innkeeper and said to him: *“Look, Marinos has died.”*

And the innkeeper replied:

“May God forgive him; for he has cast a blight on my house.”

The Abbot answered:

“Repent, my brother; for you have sinned before God and have misled me by your words, because Marinos was a woman.”

When the innkeeper realized this, he was abashed and glorified God. A short while later his daughter arrived, full of remorse, and told the truth: *“It was the soldier who dishonored and defiled me.”* And immediately she was healed of the affliction that had been sent to her by God.

When the brothers had taken the body of St. Mary, they anointed it with myrrh and laid it in a holy place, giving it a proper burial and praising Christ the Savior of all, Who ever glorifies them who glorify Him. To Him be glory unto the ages of ages. Amen.

* Demetrios G. Tsames, *Meterikon* [Lives of the Holy Mothers], Vol. I (Thessalonica: Ekdoseis “He Hagia Makrina,” 1990), pp. 314-319.