



■ A very soul-profiting story from St. John Chrysostomos

Great is the Power of Love and Repentance*

A certain monk, after much perspiration shed in asceticism while dwelling in the desert with only one fellow-ascetic and living an Angelic life, in his approaching old age, I know not how, but by some Satanic occurrence and slothfulness of soul, allowed a small opening to the Evil One and fell into the desire to have relations with a woman—he who had never seen a woman since devoting himself to the monastic life.

At first, he demanded that his companion give him meat and wine, threatening to go down to the market-place should he not receive them. He said these things, not because he desired to eat meat, but rather because he wished to find some occasion and pretext to go down to the city. Perplexed, his companion satisfied his desire by giving him what he asked, fearing lest a refusal drive him to a greater evil.

When, however, the Elder saw that his ploy had failed, he then openly demonstrated his shamelessness and revealed his sham, saying that he must without fail go down to the city. Since the other could not restrain him, he finally let him go, following him from a distance and observing the reason for which he was going down to the city.

Seeing him going into a house of ill repute and understanding that he had entered into relations with a prostitute, he waited outside. And when the Elder had gratified his improper desire and exited the place, his fellow-ascetic greeted him with open arms, throwing himself on his neck. Having warmly embraced him, without condemning him

in any way for what he had done, he only besought him, now that he had fully gratified his desire, to return to his hermitage.

Ashamed by the great clemency of his brother, the Elder was wounded to the heart and, brought to contrition over his reckless act, followed him back to the mountain. When they arrived, he asked his brother to enclose him in a small cell and, when the doors had been shut, to give him bread and water at daily intervals. He also begged him to tell whoever sought him that he had died.

When he had told his companion these things and persuaded him to lock him in, he remained there permanently, with fasting, prayer, and tears cleansing his soul of the stain of his sin.

A short while later, when the neighboring country was being scourged by drought and all of its inhabitants were grieving, someone was exhorted in a dream to go beseech the recluse to pray and bring an end to the drought.

When this man arrived at that place, however, accompanied by others, he found only the recluse's companion. Upon questioning him, they learned that the recluse had died.

Perceiving that they had been deceived, they began again to pray; and, by the same dream, they heard the same thing as before. And then, encircling the one who had, indeed, misled them, they begged him to reveal the man to him; for they firmly insisted that he had not died, but was alive. Hearing these things, and seeing that the secret had been revealed, he led them to the holy man.

After demolishing the wall—for he had blocked up this entrance as well—and all had entered, they fell at the Elder's feet; and, recounting the events to him, they begged him to help them in the face of the famine.

He, however, at first resisted, claiming that he had no such boldness before God, since his sin was always in his mind's eye as vividly as when he had committed it.

When they had told him everything that had come to pass, he was persuaded; and, after he prayed, he brought the drought to an end. □

* See St. John Chrysostomos, *To Theodore after His Fall*, E. Π. E. Vol. XXVIII, pp. 845-847. See also *Patrologia Græca*, Vol. XLVII, cols. 304-305.