

AN
ELDER
SAID...



Edifying Stories
and Teachings from
Ancient and Modern Times

■ When even a mouse teaches us a lesson!

Union with God and Love for our Neighbor

Once, a certain monk left his cenobium and blessed obedience and went into the desert to become a hesychast.

He was beset by the thought that he should devote himself day and night to the study and contemplation of the name of Jesus Christ, and especially the mystery of the Triune God. He believed that in the solitude of the desert and the calm of *hesychia*, he would be able to unite himself with God, free from cares and disturbances.

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After two or three days, however, at some moment during his sacred meditations, he sensed a presence near him. A little mouse had climbed onto his patched and torn sandal and was sniffing at his big toe. His attention was distracted, and it became impossible for him to keep his mind fixed on the memory of God and on his prayer.

Looking at the mouse, he said within himself: "I left everything so that I could commune with God correctly and without distraction, and now a mouse comes to ruin it! This is too much..."

With irritation, he said to the mouse: "You repulsive thing, why are you interrupting my prayer?"

"Because I am hungry," the mouse replied.



The hesychast answered with indignation, without even wondering how the mouse spoke with a human voice:

“Get out of here, filthy rodent! I am struggling with a thousand labors to try to unite myself with God, and you come asking me to concern myself with your stomach!”

And—*thwak!*—he kicked it off his foot into the opposite corner of his cave.

Then the mouse turned, looked him in the eyes, and with great serenity answered him in human speech:

“Learn this once and for all, Father. If you cannot unite yourself with your fellow ascetics around you, and with old Father Abbacum, who is burning with fever and dying of hunger in the cave next to yours, and with every ‘Abbacum,’ that is, your neighbor who suffers and is in pain,

who hungers and thirsts,

who lies naked and wounded,

and if you do not have compassion on him

and stand by him in his need,

then never, *under any circumstance*, will you be able to unite yourself with the God of love and mercy.”

And with that, the mouse vanished.

Source: Protopresbyter Stephanos K. Anagnostopoulos, *Spiritual Journeys through the Beatitudes* (Piraeus 2009), pp. 288–289. Translated from the Greek.