Philopatyr Marcorios

(Abu Sifein)

  Philopatyr was born in 224 A.D. in the city of Eskentos in Cappadocia (Eastern Asia Minor.) The word Philopatyr is a Greek word which means Father of Love (Patyr = father, Philo = love). His family used to live on hunting wild animals. One day his father Yares, along with his grandfather, was hunting in the forest when they were attacked by a wild beast. The animal jumped on the grandfather, and that scared Yares so much that he fainted.

While he was unconscious, he had a vision: he saw a brilliant light and heard a voice saying, "Yares, I am your God who loves you. I know that you have a good heart and that you hate the pagan idols. I want to inform you that your son Philopatyr will become like a tree bearing good fruits, and because of him, I will bless you and your wife. Philopatyr will be my witness and will defy all prejudice in my name."

Shortly after, Yares, his wife and his son were baptized and they were given new names. Yares became Noah, his wife became Saphina and Philopatyr became Marcorios. The news of their baptism spread quickly in the city and the prince ordered them to be arrested and thrown to the wild animals. But the Lord, who shut the mouths of the lions at the time of Daniel, tamed the wild animals and they did not harm them. The prince and his soldiers were astonished and decided to release Yares and his family.

When the Berbers attacked Eskentos, Noah went to fight them. He was taken prisoner and was brought to their foreign country, where he served them for seventeen months. When the war finally ended, he went back to his city and joined his family, but he died shortly after.

After the death of Noah, the pagan king Dicius chose Marcorios to replace his father. He led the army against the Berbers. After several days of fighting, the archangel Michael appeared to Marcorios holding a shining sword. He said, "Marcorios, servant of Jesus Christ, don't be afraid. Take this sword from my hand and fight the Berbers with it. Don't forget your God when you come back victoriously. I am Michael the Archangel, whom God sent to inform you that you should suffer for the Lord's name. I shall be with you and support you until you complete your testimony. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in you. "

The saint took the sword from the Archangel. He went to fight the Berbers with two swords. He conquered them as he felt the divine strength fill his heart. When Dicius heard the news about the triumphant victory, he was very pleased. He appointed Marcorios prince and gave him many honorable medals.

In 249 A.D. Dicius blasphemed against Christ and started persecuting the Christians. He issued a decree compelling everyone to offer sacrifices to his pagan gods. The Archangel Michael appeared to Marcorios and told him to remember his Lord and not to be scared of the persecutions. The saint was happy of the encouragement he received from the Lord and spent the whole night praying fervently, and confessing his weakness to God.

The next morning, the king sent some messengers to summon Marcorios to the palace, but he excused himself, saying that he was tired. The day after, the king sent for Marcorios again. He told him, "Dear Marcorios, let's go offer incense to the gods who helped us attain victory in the war." Being kind, Marcorios didn't say anything but as they were going, he slipped through the crowd and went away. However, one of the king's guards reported his absence, and the king called Marcorios and asked him, "Is it true that you refused to worship the idols who helped us during the war?"

Marcorios answered with courage, "Your Majesty, the victory was not due to dumb idols made by human hands. It was accomplished by the grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ who sent his Archangel to give me a sword and strengthened me. I cannot deny my God and worship statues."

The king was mad, but held himself back, because he didn't want to loose a courageous hero like Marcorios. He tried to persuade him by promising him a higher position, and large sums of money, but to no avail. So he stripped him from all his gold medals and ranks. In all that, Marcorios' faith was unshaken. Then the king ordered him to be thrown in jail.

That did not stop the saint from praying and singing hymns in prison. During the night, Michael the Archangel appeared to him and told him, "Don't be afraid of the tortures. Confess your faith in Jesus publicly because He's the only One able to save you."

The next morning, the king called Marcorios and tried again to convince him to give up his faith. When he refused, the king decided to start the torturing. The soldiers hung the saint between two poles, higher than the ground so that they could hit him with sharp nails. They tried also to cut his body with sharp blades and burn it, but because of the Lord's grace, Marcorios was able to endure all these tortures in silence. Back in jail, the Archangel appeared and touched Marcorios' body. He was instantly healed.

The next day, when the king saw that the saint was in perfect health, he attributed it to witcheraft. Marcorios told him that it was Jesus who is the true healer of the soul and the body. Nevertheless, after Dicius tried so many tortures without any success, he decided to have him beheaded.

Marcorios lifted up his arms and prayed fervently, asking the Lord-to accept him in paradise. Then, all of a sudden, he saw The Lord Jesus in a glorified vision, surrounded by many angels. Jesus said, "My chosen son, Marcorios, come to your eternal rest with the saints. Your prayers have risen up to me like the aroma of good-smelling incense. Miracles will be performed in any church bearing your name. And I will save those who ask Me through your intercession. Whoever writes or reads the story of your life will have their names written in the Book of Life."

Then, after the Lord had blessed him, Marcorios was so happy that he ran to his executioners, and begged them to carry out the king's orders immediately. Then he knelt down and said, "Lord, do not count this sin against them." Marcorios was martyred on the 4th of December in the year 250 A.D. He was only 25 years old.

After the end of the first persecution, God wanted to reveal the place of the saint's burial. Marcorios appeared to a poor man in the city, and told him that he was Marcorios the martyr of the Lord. "My body is buried in Cappadocia Gardens , under the old house on the way to the royal palace. My body looks as white as snow, because Jesus was present at the time of my martyrdom," said the saint.

The next morning, the man went to dig under the old house. Then he smelled perfume, and at the same time he saw the body of the saint. The news spread quickly and many people came to take a look at the blessed body. They moved it to the village's Church until they built a new church bearing his name, and Marcorios' body was buried there with respect and devotion.

A few years later, the Armenian patriarch visited Egypt and met with the Egyptian patriarch. The latter asked him if Egypt could have part of the relics of Saint Marcorios to be placed in the church that bears his name in old Cairo. On the 9th of Baouna (June 16) part of the blessed body was offered to Egypt. May the blessing and prayers of this great martyr and Saint Marcorios Abu Sifein be with us all. Amen.