

The Saint, Anba Abraam

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The Saint, Anba Abraam, Bishop of El-Fayoum and El-Giza "The friend of the poor" 1829 A.D. - June 10th, 1914 A.D.

The Saint, Anba Abraam, Bishop of El-Fayoum and El-Giza was born in 1829A.D. (1545 Martyrs) in a small village called Delga, 16 Miles (27 Km.) south west of Malawi in the episcopate of Dyrout. His name by birth was Boulos (Paul) Ghobrial. His parents were righteous people. They raised him up loving our lord Jesus Christ and the church. Boulos' parents sent him to the church school "Kouttab" where he was taught reading, writing, arithmetic and the Holy Bible. He was also taught Hymns, psalms and praises. He had always desired to learn with meekness and politeness.

At age 8, his mother had a serious illness which led to her departure. His father cared for him thereafter.

At age 15, as he was a bright student, he distinguished himself in his knowledge of the Holy Books and Church Hymns, so the village priest recommended him to the then bishop of Dyrout, Anba Youssab (Joseph) who ordained him a deacon for the church of Gilda. Boulos heart longed for monastic life, so he went to the Monastery of St. Mary Known as "Al-Meharaq" in mount qusqam, El-Quosseiah, south of Assiut. At the monastery, he worked hard while being quiet, and for this reason, he was loved by his fellow monks. They nominated him to be elevated from novas (beginner under test) to be a monk. He was only 19 years of age when he became a monk in 1848 AD and his name was kept as Monk Boulos El-Maharaquey.

He was humble and he had a pure life. He prayed much in seclusion and he had an amazing love of giving to the needy. Accordingly, the monks loved him exceedingly. When Anba Yakobos (Jacob), bishop of El-Meniah, heard of him, he summoned him. He retained him to assist him in the episcopate for a period of time during which he promoted him to a priest.

After four years, when Fr. Boulos returned to the monastery, the monks with a consensus decided to make him the abbot over the monastery after the death of their Abbot, Fr. Abd El-Malek. Fr. Boulos was then promoted to archpriest (hegumen) in the days of Pope Demitrius II (111th Patriarch). He remained Abbot of the monastery for five years, during which the monastery was the refuge for thousands of the poor. So he was called the father of the poor and the destitute.

Also, during his time as abbot, he did not spare an effort to improve the condition of the monastery spiritually and physically. He improved its finances by developing its agricultural land.

After five years of blessed service, as he increased his charity toward the poor, the orphans and the widows, some of the monks became more resentful of him, for they considered these charitable works as squandering and extravagant acts. They complained against him to Anba Morcos, Metropolitan of El-Behira, who was the acting Patriarch after the death of Pope Demitrius. Anba Morcos accepted their complaints and deposed him as the abbot of their monastery.

Fr. Boulos did not argue, and shortly after his dismissal, he left El-Muharrak monastery and went to the monastery of El-Baramous. Several monks from El-Muharrak monastery went to the monastery of El-Baramous, with archpriest Bolous (Abba Abraam), because they did not like the attitudes of the complaining monks.

The abbot of the monastery of El-Baramous at that time was archpriest Youhanna El-Nassekh (Youhanna the Scribe).Fr. Youhanna was known in his time for scribing (writing by hand) church books who later on became Pope Kyrillos the fifth (112th Patriarch). Fr. Boulos spent most of his time worshiping God and studying the Holy Books. However, he did not stop his love for the poor. He shared his food and clothes with the Bedouins ('Al-Erban') who lived in the desert surrounding the monastery.

In 1881 A.D. (1597 A.M.), Pope Kyrillos V chose Fr Boulos and ordained him a bishop for the parish of El-Fayoum and El-Giza to replace its reposed bishop, Anba Eisak. Fr. Boulos was ordained with the name of Anba Abraam.

During his time as a Bishop of El-Fayoum and El-Giza (1881 -1914 A.D.), the episcopate became a place of rest and comfort for the poor and rich alike. He became famous for two attributes:

First, his charity to the multitude of poor that came to the bishopric residence. He gave them all what he had of money. He made the bishopric residence a shelter for many of them. He offered clothing for those who had no clothes and food for those who were hungry. He never allowed anyone to offer him food that was better than that offered to the poor.

Second, he was famous for his prayer of faith. Many miracles were performed, through his prayers, and on his hands.

His fame was spread to all parts of Egypt and also to some parts of Europe. Many patients, of different religions, came to him, seeking the blessing of his prayers and were healed. Anba Abraam was very erudite of the holy books. He always gave advice, instructions and sermons to his visitors which showed the great depth of his knowledge. More important he possessed a pure nature and many virtues, particularly, his severe denial of himself, and his true renouncement of the pleasures of life and its vain glory. His food and clothing were just bare necessities. His ambition never looked up to the glory of higher ranks or positions.

He was also straightforward in revealing his own opinion, looking only for the truth. He never gave any attention to the rank and greatness of people in higher places, for their greatness was far less than the greatness of the truth.

The nice Aroma of Christ in him, reached even the diplomatic corp. When the British Viceroy (Special Representative of England to Egypt) wanted to see him, the head of the region and the leaders of the Copts of Fayoum were embarrassed because the building of the residence of the bishop was old and the furniture was very modest and in bad shape. But when they saw how the Viceroy respected him and kissed the cross in his hand and his hands, they were all impressed.

In 1893, Anba Abraam had bad sores in one of his legs. The doctors who examined him recommended amputation. He smiled and said: "It is not God's will for this leg which serves him to be cut. I put my trust in him!" After two months, his leg was completely healed, and he offered a special prayer of thanksgiving. The Church was full beyond capacity with parishioners carrying branches of palm trees and olive branches, waving and singing with great joy and happiness for the safety of their father.

One time, some rich people of Fayoum bought furniture for his reception room, bed room, and kitchen and brought it over. He ordered his deputy to put it in storage. When a woman approached him about her inability to buy the furniture needed for the wedding of her daughter, he gave her everything.

Few people of El-Fayoum complained to The Pope, Pope Cyril V about the way Anba Abraam gives all the money of the episcopate to the needy.

Pope Cyril V sent for him. Anba Abraam went to see the pope without delay. It was afternoon, he walked in, the shutters were closed. There was a beam of light that went through a pinhole in the shutter. Anba Abraam was then very old, he mistook the light beam for a laundry robe, it was a common practice to have a laundry robe for hanging cloths. He threw his 'Faragia' (overcoat) on the beam. The 'Faragia' stayed there. The pope was dumbfounded, he greeted him, inquired about his health, asked his blessings and prayers and did not even discuss the reason for the meeting. Later on, Pope Cyril V gave Anba Abraam money from the patriarchate to pay for the projects at his episcopate. When the people of Fayoum went to see the pope complaining that nothing changed, the pope told them that he could not argue with the power of God in Anba Abraam and told them all that happened in front of his own eyes.

Anba Abraam spent 33 years as bishop. He had a life of intimate communion with our Lord Jesus Christ and his saints. He knew the Holy Books and enjoyed the liturgy with all the hymns and praises very intimately, and he lived a life of extreme monasticism. He chose poverty, and was extremely generous, loving, and kind to the poor.

In his final days on earth, he was bed ridden for one month, and a multitude of people went to see him and receive his blessings. He informed those who were close to him that he was going away to be with the Lord Jesus Christ. And, on the 3rd day of Baouna, 1630 A.M. (June 10, 1914 A.D.), Anba Abraam, the Friend of the Poor departed to heaven. More than ten thousand Christian and Moslems walked in his funeral precession. To this day, his pure body is laid in a tomb that was prepared for him in the Church of the monastery of the Virgin Mary in El-Ezab, El-Fayoum.

Many miracles were manifested through him after his departure, and his tomb became and still is a pilgrimage for many who seek his intercession in special needs or infirmities. In 1964, 50 years after his departure according to Church tradition of waiting 50 years before canonizing a saint (declaring a departed person a saint), the Synod of the Coptic Orthodox Church declared unanimously the Sainthood of Anba Abraam, the departed Bishop of El-Fayoum based on first hand stories proven by many witnesses: Stories of his piety, wonders, and miracles. This happened when pope Kyrillos (Cyril) VI was pope and patriarch. The name of Anba Abraam is mentioned in the congregation of the saints which is recited before the profession in the liturgy.

May his prayers be with us and Glory be to God forever. Amen.