

SAINT SISOES THE GREAT

—Commemorated July 6th—

Saint Sisoës was a desert father who lived during the fourth century. He lived in the Egyptian desert as a monk, following in the example of Saint Anthony the Great. On account of his great love for the Lord, he lived an ascetic life of prayer, fasting, and manual labor, and due to his extreme humility, he received exceptional grace from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Once, a certain man took his young son and went to visit Saint Sisoës, who was living on a mountain in the desert. During their journey, on account of the grueling heat, the man's son happened to die. This person did not allow himself to be overcome by distress but, rather, picked up his son and continued with faith toward the Saint's hut. When he arrived, he fell to the ground before Saint Sisoës, and also positioned his son face down as if they were prostrating themselves before him and asking for his blessing. After the Saint blessed them, the father got up and walked out of the room, leaving his son behind on the ground at the saint's feet. Not having realized that the boy was actually dead, but thinking that he was still making a prostration, Saint Sisoës told him, "Get up and go, my child." With these words, the boy got up and exited the room. When the father saw his son, he was awestruck. He quickly ran back into the hut, fell down before Saint Sisoës, and told him what had just occurred. Upon hearing this, the Saint became unsettled, because he did not want such a thing to happen. In order to put the Saint at ease, one of his disciples ordered the father not to relate this event to anyone as long as the Elder was alive.

A certain monk who had been wronged by another brother went to Saint Sisoës to express his grievance: "I was wronged by a brother, and I want to seek retribution." The Saint, "No, my child. It is better to leave the retribution to God." But the monk insisted, "I will not be at peace until I bring him to justice." Seeing the monk's obstinacy, the Saint said to him, "Ok my brother. Let us pray then." The Saint stood up and started to pray with these words: "Lord, we no longer are in need of your guardianship. Because we will take justice into our own hands."

When the monk heard this, he fell to the Saint's feet and said, "I no longer want to seek retribution from my brother. Forgive me, Elder."

For a period of time, Saint Sisoës dwelled on the mountain where Saint Anthony had also lived. One time his attendant who would bring him provisions took longer than usual to come back to him, and as a result the Saint had not seen another human being for about ten months. One day, as the Saint was walking on the mountain, he came across a person who was hunting wild animals. The Saint greeted him and asked, "Where are you from? And how long have you been here?" To this the man replied, "I have been here on this mountain for eleven months, Father. And during this time I have not seen a single person up until now." When Saint Sisoës heard this, he returned to his hut, beating his chest and sighing, "O Sisoës! You were under the impression that you accomplished something great. And you have not even attained to the level of this layman."

A certain monk asked Saint Sisoës, "Father, I have fallen into sin. What should I do?" And the Saint replied, "Get up." The monk said, "I did get up but I fell again." And the Saint replied, "Get up, again and again." Then the monk asked, "How long can I continue doing this?" And the Saint said, "Until death comes to find you either in a good state or in a fallen state. For in whatever state a person is found, in this state he departs from this life."

Saint Sisoës once said, "Seek God, and do not seek *where* He dwells."

Saint Sisoës once visited the tomb of Alexander the Great. Standing before the tomb, and bringing to mind the transiency of this present life, he lamented: "Alas! Alas! O death, bitter is your cup! Who can evade you?" And as if addressing Alexander the Great, he asked: "Alexander: the entire world was not big enough for you. How have you now accepted to be confined to a few feet of earth? You conquered vast numbers of people. And how is it now that you cannot push away even a few tiny flies over your tomb?"

When Saint Sisoës was very old, he became ill. One day, a group of monks came to visit him. As they were gathered around him, the Saint began speaking to some people who no one else could see. The monks asked him, “What do you see, Elder?” Saint Sisoës replied, “There are some people who have come to me, and I am asking them to allow me to remain here a little longer so I can repent.” Then one of the monks asked him, “If they allow you to remain here, is there anything you can possibly do at this point to repent?” To this the Saint replied, “Even though I am not capable of doing something, I can sigh a little for my wretched soul, and that is enough for me.”

When Saint Sisoës was about to pass away from this life, there were many monks gathered around him. Suddenly, the Saint’s face became as bright as the sun, and he said, “Look, Saint Anthony has come.” A short while later he said, “Look, the choir of prophets has come,” and his face became even brighter. Then he said, “Look, the choir of the Apostles has arrived,” and his face became yet brighter. Then he began to speak with some people who no one else could see. “Who are you speaking with, father?” asked the elders. Saint Sisoës replied, “The angels have come to take me, and I am asking them to leave me here a little longer so I can repent.” To this the elders said, “You are not in need of repentance, father.” Saint Sisoës, however, responded, “I assure you that I haven’t even started to repent yet.” In this manner, all the elders present were informed that Saint Sisoës had attained perfection. Then, his face suddenly became as bright as the sun, at which point everyone was overcome with fear. Saint Sisoës then said to them, “Behold, the Lord has come and is saying, ‘bring Me the vessel of the desert.’” With these words Saint Sisoës gave up his spirit. Simultaneously, there appeared a flash of light similar to lightning, and the entire room filled with a divine fragrance.

Through the prayers of Saint Sisoës and all the Saints, may Christ our God grant us such repentance and humility. Amen.