

Life of Abba Timothy by Abba Paphnote

In analysing the life of St Noufer it is impossible to forget one of the nearest hermits who resided near him and more importantly shared his way of life. On his way into the inner depth of the Theban desert Paphnote recounts his meeting with another hermit, Abba Timothy. Not much is known about this saint except the following which Paphnote documents about his life on his journey to meet the great St Noufer.

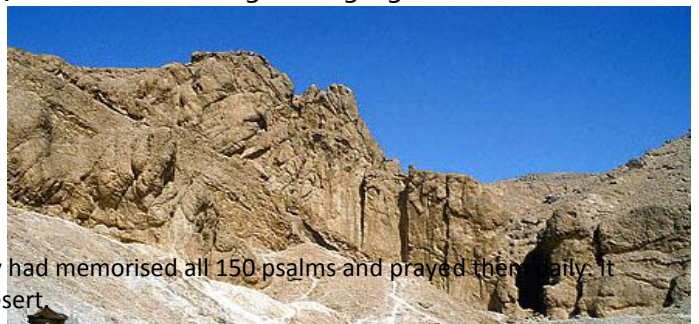
And I marched on into the desert, and I came upon another cave, and my courage came to me, and I thrust open the door [and cried out], and no one answered me. And I went in and I found no man, and I came forth, saying, "The place of a servant of God; he will soon return to this place." And I remained in that place, and I prayed until the day ran to its close, and I recited the books which I had learned by heart¹. And afterwards, just as the sun was about to set, I looked up and saw a herd of buffaloes in the far distance coming towards me, and that brother was among them, and when he approached me he was naked, and his hair covered his shame, and it served as raiment to clothe him.

And when he had come to the place where I was he was exceedingly afraid, for he thought that I was a spirit, and he stood up and prayed, for very often spirits used to come to tempt him, according to what he himself subsequently said. And I perceived that he was afraid, and I went to him, and I said to him, "Why are you afraid? O servant of God? Look, and you will see my footprints, and that I am a man. Touch me, and you will find that I am flesh and blood." And when he had gazed upon me he repeated the prayer in the Gospel.

And I urged him to take me into the cave. And he asked me, "Why did you come to this place?" And I said, "I came to this place because I wished to see the servants of God who live in this desert, and God has not denied me that which I asked of Him." And I asked him, saying, "How did you come to this place? And how long ago is it since you came here? And what do you usually eat? And why are you naked and have nothing to clothe you?"

And he began to talk with me, saying, "I was a monk, and I lived among a congregation of monks in Thebais. And there came into my heart a thought of this kind: Rise up, go forth, and abide in a place by myself. And only then will I lead a life of peaceful

¹ The Monks of Egypt would memorise whole books of the bible and many had memorised all 150 psalms and prayed them daily. It was well known that the monks of Egypt were called the angels of the desert.



The tough terrain of the Thebais desert!

contemplation. I wanted to become an anchorite, and receive the brethren. I wanted to show abundant hospitality to strangers, and find abundant wages by the work of my own hands. And that which I thought in my mind I carried into effect. I came away from the house of the monks, I built myself a habitation in a place apart, and I took up my abode there. And men employed me, and what they gave me for the work of my hands I used to give away in charity to strangers.

"At that time the Devil became envious of me, because of the wage which I was earning before the Lord in respect of what I did for strangers and for other folk who were in want, for he saw how diligent I was in manual labour, and he was exceeding jealous of me. And he entered into a certain woman who was a nun, who came to me, and employed me to do certain hand work, and when I had finished it I gave it to her, and she talked to me about further work.

"And it became a customary thing for us to meet each other, and the Enemy put it into my heart to take work of the hands from her. And when we had learned to talk freely to each other we ate bread together, and the affair continued to grow until at last we brought forth death, and produced iniquity. And when once I had fallen with her into folly we remained in this wicked state for six months.

"Afterwards I meditated in my heart upon what I had done, and I grieved, and wept exceedingly, and I was always having sighs. And I thought in my heart when I was alone, saying, 'If I were to die today or tomorrow they would punish us with a severe punishment, with the gnashing of teeth, and with outer darkness, and with the fire that cannot be quenched, and with the worm that never sleeps, and that devours the soul. Rise up, let us escape from this place, let us get away into the desert.' And I wished to escape from the sin.

"And I rose up and came forth, and I departed into the desert, and I have never been with that woman since I have been here. And I found this spring of water, and this palm-tree, and this cave. The palm-tree yields twelve bunches of dates each year, a bunch for each month, and one bunch of dates is sufficient to last me for the month. I possess nothing, neither raiment nor the food of bread. My hair increased as my clothes were worn out utterly long ago, I clothe myself, as is most seemly, with the raiment of my hair. And behold, it is thirty years since I came to this place, and the climate here affects



my health uniformly. And I never eat bread."

And I asked him, "At first when you came to this place, did you suffer greatly?"

And he said to me, "Yea, I did suffer greatly, so much so in fact that sometimes through the intensity of my sorrow I used to throw myself on the ground, and cry up to God because of my manifold sins. And I also suffered great pain through an infirmity which was upon me. [One day] I looked and I saw a man who was exceedingly splendid standing by me, and he said to me, 'In what part of the body are you ill?' And my strength returned to me a little, and I said to him, 'I am ill in my liver.' And he said to me, 'Show me the place where you are ill,' and I showed him the place where my liver was in pain. And he stretched out his hand upon me, and his fingers rested upon each other, and he made an opening between my ribs as with a sword (or, knife), and he brought forth my liver, and he showed me the wounds that were in it, and he relieved the pains in them, and bound the wounds up, and he put my liver back into its place again. And he rubbed my body lightly with his hands, and he rejoined the sides of the opening which he had made in my side, and he said to me, 'Behold, you are healed. Sin not again lest evil more severe than this come upon you. But make yourself a servant of God from this time forever.' From that day all my bowels have remained in a healthy condition, and I have ceased to suffer in my liver, and I have lived in this place in the desert without pains. And he taught me what the medicament was after he treated my liver."

And I entreated him to let me stay in the cave where I had seen him at first, and he said to me, "my strength is not sufficient to enable me to resist the attacks of the devils." And I urged him to tell me his name, and he said to me, "Timothy is my name. Remember me, O my beloved brother [in thy prayers], so that the Lord may make me to bring to an end the good fight where He has summoned me." And I cast myself down at his feet so that he might remember and bless me. And he blessed me, saying, "The Lord bless me! May he deliver me from the snares of the Devil, and may he set me on all His good paths at all times, and may you escape to the saints."

And when he had finished blessing me my strength came to me in such a degree that I never felt when I was hungry or when I was thirsty.

The Life of Abba Timothy was truly amazing and considering the nature of his sin he imitated the life of St Mary of Egypt (334AD-421AD) who left adulterous sin and abandoned worldly desires for the quest of eternal peace and happiness in the undomesticated deserts of Egypt.