

Saint Pachomius

SAINT OF THE DAY

09_05_2021



Saint Pachomius (c. 292-348), generally considered the founder of cenobitic monasticism, achieved several records in the history of Christianity. These records are all the more surprising considering that he was born of pagan parents: proof of how Providence works wonders through those who give their full acceptance to the divine will.

Originally from the High Thebaid, around the age of 21 he was forced to enlist in the

Roman army. With many other recruits he ended up on a vessel that, sailing down the Nile, one evening arrived at Thebes. Here Pachomius was impressed by the behaviour of some of the city's inhabitants, who did everything they could to bring relief to him and his fellow soldiers, donating food and money to those young men who had been mistreated and were being kept as prisoners. He wanted to know who his benefactors were, and he thus discovered their faith in "Jesus Christ, the only Son of God".

Shortly afterwards Pachomius was freed from military obligations and wished to receive Baptism. Hearing of the venerable example of a desert Father named Palemon, he decided to join him. And for seven years he grew under Palemon's spiritual guidance. More or less at the same time he met Saint Anthony Abbot, from whom he learnt other important teachings. One day, while he was gathered in prayer near a place known as Tabenna, he heard a voice that ordered him to build a dwelling for the monks that God would send him. Thus was born, around 320, his first cenobitic monastery (perhaps the first real monastery ever), that is, designed for life in common, which represented a novelty compared to the monasticism experienced by anchorites and, even more radically, by hermits. His brother John joined him and in a relatively short time the monastery of Tabenna became home to about a hundred monks.

It was Pachomius who wrote the oldest known monastic rule. His fame spread throughout the Christian East, also thanks to the numerous conversions he inspired and the zeal with which he defended orthodoxy from the heretical Arians. In 333 he was visited by the almost contemporary Saint Athanasius and later by the much younger Saint Basil the Great. The latter drew from Pachomius several ideas that were later transposed into the Basilian rule, the most widespread in Eastern monasticism.

The Egyptian saint is also credited with the diffusion among the monks of the prayer rope, whose invention is traced back to Saint Anthony. At the time the daily recitation of the 150 Psalms was customary. But for religious who were illiterate and unable to memorize the entire Psalter, there was the problem of reciting an adequate number of alternative prayers. It is handed down that it was Pachomius himself who suggested to his monks (who, at his death, were already scattered in the seven or eight monasteries he founded) to use the rope to keep count of their prayers, according to the practice that over the centuries would become common among the faithful, thanks to the Holy Rosary.