

SAINT MENA

Born around 285 A.D. to Christian parents. His father Eudoxius was governor of the Roman district of Africa (in Lybia) but originally he was from the Egyptian city of Nikius which is close to the present day Menouf. His mother was a devout Copt called Euphemia. They were barren. One day his mother went to the church and it was the feast of the Virgin Mary. Every one was happy except Euphemia, who prayed and asked the intercession of the Virgin, that she may bear a child. She was praying with many tears, when suddenly she heard a voice saying "Amen" She felt afraid, and went to her husband to tell him what had happened and he told her, "Be sure that God has heard your prayer and He will give us a blessed child."

When Mena was born, his father was very happy, he set free many who had been imprisoned and gave many alms to the poor. His parents raised him as a devout Christian, always attending church, dedicated to fasting and prayers and the reading of the scripture.

Around the year 296, when Mena was 11, his father departed, and three years later his mother also departed. Alone and 14 years old, he found himself heir to a large sum of money and property, but more importantly, his parents left him an inheritance of virtues and love for Christ.

He kept to his pious life of prayer, fasting and alms getting even closer to the church.

Around the year 300, Mena now 15 years of age, a friend of his father who was a General in the Roman army, appointed him as an officer in the army. He stayed in the army for 3 years, still loyal to Christ, while doing his duty as a soldier of the Roman Emperor.

In the year 303, the Emperors Diocletian and Maximian made a decree, that all subjects of the Roman Empire should offer sacrifices to the Roman gods. The decree was read aloud through the Empire, including the district of Africa. St. Mena, resigned from the army and went into the desert to avoid being forced to worship the Roman abominations. He gave whatever he had to the poor and lived a solitary life of prayer and ascetism in the Lybian desert.

Around the end of the fifth year for his sojourn in the desert, he received a revelation while praying. He saw heaven and the angels carrying crowns that they put upon the heads of the saints who have completed their strife and became martyrs. They were shining like stars and the angels were joyfully crowning them. He coveted the glory that they had and wanted to be like them. While meditating on what he had seen, he heard a voice from heaven telling him, "Blessed are you Mena for you have been called to righteousness since your youth. And even as you have been a good soldier for your earthly king, Christ has chosen you to be his soldier. And he shall give you three crowns. One for your virginity, and one for your ascetism and solitude in the desert and the third for your martyrdom, which will be more glorious than many who have preceded you. Your name will be greatly honoured, and multitudes from every tribe and every tongue shall come from all over the world to worship me in the church that will be built in your name in the land of Egypt. Mena rejoiced exceedingly and thanked God in prayers and tears, intending to go early in the morning to complete his strife and receive his crowns.

It was the year 309 when he went back to the province of Africa, and there, in the main street of the city, he saw a great multitude of people. It was the feast day of one of the Roman gods. There were parades of soldiers in their wonderful attire and people shouting and clapping their hands. There, the 23 year old Mena in his simple monastic attire, interrupts the parade and shouts with a loud voice, "I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me." Rom 10:20. The people were astonished, and the governor Pierus ordered him to be brought forward. The following conversation took place.

G: What is your name?

M: Mena, a servant of the Lord Christ, king of heaven and earth.

G: Are you a stranger that you dare to interrupt the religious festivities?

At this point one of the attendants whispers in the ears of the governor, "I know this man, he is a soldier in the Rotiliac legion and his commander is Fermilian, he has been a deserter for the last five years.

G: Is that true?

M: yes, but when the decree to worship idols was made I decided to leave and become a soldier for the king of heaven and earth.

G:

And why did you do this?

M: I am a Christian, and I left the army so that I do not partake of the evil doings.

G: Fine, we will look into the matter later on but let us not interrupt the festivities.

Mena was thrown into jail until the feast day were over. He spent the night in prayer and spiritual songs.

On the second day Pierus held a council and brought Mena to interrogate him.

G: How dare you cause a disturbance during the feast? Who are you and where are you from?

M: I am from Egyptian origin, I left the service of the earthly king to serve in the army of Jesus Christ.

G: Where have you been since your desertion?

M: I have lived in the desert among the beasts in order to be saved. That is better than living among sinners and end up being destroyed.

G: I have been told that you are of noble birth, so repent from your error, and sacrifice for the gods and I will forgive you and recommend to the emperor that you serve in your father's rank.

St. Mena refused to give in to promises of worldly rewards or even to threats of pain and suffering, seeking the unfading crowns that the Lord had promised him.

The governor ordered him to be tortured severely until he repents from his error. They subjected the saint to all sorts of painful contraptions, but he remained steadfast. The governor came to him once again saying,

G: haven't you had enough?

M: The torture you inflict on me is nothing compared to the glory that awaits me. Behold the angels of my Lord and my king are round about me to help me and relieve my sufferings.

G: Who is your king? Is there another king beside Caesar?

M: He is Jesus Christ the son of the living God, the Everlasting, the provider to all.

Another round of torture is ordered but the saint remained steadfast. Finally, the governor ordered him to be beheaded and that his body be burned.

He was taken to the place of execution by soldiers, he went with them rejoicing and hymning to the Lord. He knelt and prayed, committing his soul to his heavenly father then he voluntarily gave his neck to the executioner, He was received among the martyrs who rejoice in paradise on the 15th day of Hathor. They tried to burn his relics but the fire had no power on the blessed remains. After three days, devout men took the relics, put ointments and spices on it and shrouded it and kept it in the house of one of the faithful.

Years passed and a revolt happened in Egypt in the district of Mariut west of Alexandria. The Governor of Mariut asked the Governor of Africa to send him some reinforcements. St. Mena's old Legion called Rotiliac now had a devout Christian commander named Athanasius. He was ordered to take his legion and to go to Mariut to assist its governor in the revolt.

Athanasius spoke to some of his Christian soldiers and told them to bring the relics of S. Mena, the beloved of Christ so that they may be kept safe through his intercession. They secretly took the relics into the ship. On the way to Mariut, strange creatures started attacking them from the sea that had long necks and heads that looked like camels heads. Fire came out of the relics and destroyed the animals. After five days they came to alexandria carrying the relics, and from there they went to mariut where they defeated the Berber. They wanted to go back , so they put the relics on a camel but the camel would not move ans so did the other camels, They then perceived that it was there that the relics should be buried, so, they made a wooden plaque and carved a likeness of the saint and the sea creatures around his feet and took it with them, and put the holy relics in a wooden coffin and buried it with a replica of the likeness that they carved on the wooden plaque. They then returned to their own country rejoicing.

Discovery of the relics:

a few years went by, till one day, a boy who was lame since his birth was crawling in the desert and suddenly he saw a light in the desert, he went towards the light which was coming from the relics of the saints, and there he fell asleep. The people of the village went out to look for the lame boy and finally found him asleep, they woke him up and lo and behold he started walking and jumping and running. The people went to the place where he had laid down, and they saw the light that was coming out of the sepulchre that had the relics. They went back and brought all the sick from the village and brought them to the sepulchre and they were all healed.

Many miracles happened from the sepulchre, and the Pope St. Athanasius ordered a large church to be built around the sepulchre. Later on, during the papacy of St, Theophilus, an extension of the church was built and around the fifth century, a city was built around the cathedral that contained the relics. People from all over the world came to be healed as evident from the archeological finds in the are that showed coins and artefacts from the four corners of the world.

Destruction of the city:

The destruction started in the ninth century when the Chalcedonians destroyed the city, and the nomad Arabs plundered the marble of the church to sell it for gain. The destruction was complete by the thirteenth century and the relics disappeared under the ruins.

Some of the nomads where digging when they found a box containing the relics covered with expensive silken linens. The relics were later retrieved by a rich Copt who kept it in his house with great honour. In the area where the relics were kept, there lived a devout monk called Isaac. The saint appeared to him in a dream and made him self known to the monk and told him that his relics are in the box. The relics were later translated to the Monastery of fum el Khalig near Cairo during the Papacy of Pope Benjamin the second (1327-1339) The relics were subjected to many attempts at stealing them, so the monks kept them in a secret place inside the church. They did such a good job that they could not find the place where they hid them!

On the night of September 7, 1873 a priest called Abouna Tadros Mena was sleeping in the chuch where the relics disappeared when he saw a Roman soldier waking him up and taking him to where the relics were hidden. The relics were put back in the church and people came from every place to see them.

It was his Holiness Pope Kyrollos who ordered the restoeration of the monastery of St, Mena and restored parts of the relics to the new cathedral which was built near the original one built by St. Athanasius. The Louvre.