



■ Fragrance from the flowers of the desert



Saint Isidora the Fool-for-Christ *

Commemorated on 1 May

AT THE Convent of the Great Pachomios, in Tabennesis, there lived another nun, Isidora, who pretended, for Christ's sake, to be insane and a demoniac.

To such an extent did the others abhor her, that they did not eat with her; this is something that she, herself, had chosen. She moved about the kitchen doing every sort of chore, and was, as they say, the *scrubbing-cloth* of the monastery, while she put into practice the command: "*Whosoever of you believes that he is wise by the measure of this world, may he become a fool, so as to become truly wise.*"

She served the Convent with a rag wrapped around her head, while all of the others had their hair cropped short and wore *koukoulia*.

Not one of the four-hundred nuns had ever seen her eat normally so much as once in her life. She swept the *Trapeza* and washed the pots; the crumbs and leftovers were sufficient for her, because she never sat at table nor touched a piece of bread.

Never did she insult anyone, never was she resentful, and never did she utter a superfluous word, despite the fact that they buffeted her, insulted her, railed at her and spit at her.

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AN Angel appeared to St. Piteroum, a man confirmed in virtues who lived in asceticism on Mt. Porphyrite, and said to him:

*“Why do you boast that you are pious by remaining in this place? Would you like to meet a woman who is more pious than you? Go to the Convent of those of Tabennesis, and there you will find a nun who wears a crown on her head. She is superior to you. **She contends with such a multitude, and yet her heart has never distanced itself from God.** As for you, you sit here, but your mind wanders through the cities.*

Hence, he who had never before left his cell arose and besought the spiritual Fathers to allow him to visit the Convent. Since he was a renowned Elder, they gave him leave.

When he entered, he asked to see all of the nuns, but St. Isidora did not appear. Finally, he said to them: *“Bring them all to me. One is missing.”* They answered him: *“There is one more in the kitchen who is a fool.”* (So do they call those possessed by a demon.) He said to them: *“Bring her to me also. Allow me to see her.”* They went and called her, but she did not submit, either because she understood what was about to happen or because it had been revealed to her. So they dragged her by force, telling her: *“The holy Piteroum wishes to see you”* (he was, to be sure, well known).

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WHEN she had presented herself, the Saint noticed the rag on her forehead (her “crown”), fell down before her, and said: *“Bless me.”* In the same way, she also fell at his feet, saying: *“You bless me, my lord.”*

Astonished, they all told him: *“Abba, do not debase yourself; she is a fool.”* Piteroum silenced them with the words: *“You are the fools; she is my and your Amma—thus are spiritual Mothers called—, and I pray that I might be found to be her equal on the Day of Judgment.”*

Having heard these things, the nuns fell at his feet, and each one confessed the ways in which she had affronted the Saint. One said that she poured filthy dish water on her, another that she struck her with her fists, and yet another that she had smeared her nostrils with mustard. All of them confessed the outrages they had committed against

her. St. Piteroum prayed for them and departed.

Several days having passed, the fool was not able to bear the glory and honors shown to her by her sisters and, having wearied of their apologies, she left the monastery in secret. No one ever learned where she went, where she hid herself, or how she died.



* Demetrios Tsasmes, *Meterikon*, Vol. I (Thessaloniki: 1990), pp. 130-135.