

The Twenty-Fifth Day of the Blessed Month of Hatour
The Martyrdom of St. Mercurius

In the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen.

Aim

- † Familiarize the class with life of St. Mercurius
- † Introduce the concept of intercessions and miracles performed

Key verses

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake" (Matt 24:9)

Lesson

Life of St Mercuruis

St Philopater Mercurius was born in the city of Eskentos in Cappadocia, Eastern Asia Minor, and his original name means "**lover of the Father**". St Mercurius is also known by the name **Abu-Seifein**, which in Arabic means, "**the holder of two swords**", referring to a second sword given to him by Archangel Michael.

Philopater was the son of an officer in the Roman army called Yares. One day his father, Yares, was hunting in the forest with his grandfather, when they were attacked by a wild beast. The animal jumped on the grandfather, causing Yares to faint. While Yares was unconscious, he had a vision. He saw a brilliant light and heard a voice saying:

"Yares, I am your God who loves you. I know that you have a good heart and that you hate the pagan idols. I want to inform you that your son, Philopater, will become like a tree bearing good fruits, and because of him, I will bless you and your wife. Philopater will be My witness and will defy all prejudice in My Name".

Shortly after, Yares, his wife, and his son were baptized, and they were given new names. Yares became *Noah*, his wife became *Saphina*, and Philopater became *Mercurius*. The news of their baptism spread quickly in the city and the prince ordered them to be arrested and thrown to the wild animals. However, the animals did not harm them, and the prince decided to release Noah and his family.

When the Berbers attacked Eskentos, Noah went to fight them. He was taken prisoner and was brought to their country, where he was kept for **seventeen months**. When the war finally ended, he went back to his city and joined his family, but died shortly after.

After the death of Noah, the Pagan Roman Emperor Decius chose Mercurius to replace his father. He was a very strong and courageous man, and earned the respect of his fellow soldiers. When the Berbers attacked Rome, Decius went out to fight them, but when he

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saw how many they were, he became afraid. Mercurius then came to him and told him, *"Do not be afraid, because God will destroy our enemies and will bring us victory."*

After several days of fighting, the Archangel Michael appeared to Mercurius holding a shining sword. He said: *"Mercurius, servant of Jesus Christ, don't be afraid. Take this sword from my hand and fight the Berbers with it. Don't forget your God when you come back victoriously. I am Michael the Archangel, whom God sent to inform you that you should suffer for the Lord's name. I shall be with you and support you until you complete your testimony. The name of our Lord Jesus Christ will be glorified in you"*.

The saint took the sword from the archangel, hence the name *Abu-Seifein* - "the holder of two swords", a military sword and a divine sword. He conquered the Berbers, feeling the assurance of divine strength. When Decius heard the news about the triumphant victory, he appointed Mercurius prince.

Martyrdom

Nonetheless, in 249AD, Decius began his persecution of Christians, compelling everyone to offer sacrifices to his pagan gods. The Archangel Michael appeared to Mercurius and told him to remember God and not be fearful of the persecution. The saint was encouraged and spent the whole night praying fervently, and confessing his weakness to God.

The next morning, the Emperor sent some messengers to summon Mercurius to the palace, but he excused himself, saying that he was tired. The day after, the Emperor sent for Mercurius again. He told him: "Dear Mercurius, let us go offer incense to the gods who helped us attain victory in the war." Mercurius did not say anything, but as they were leaving he slipped through the crowd and went away. However, one of the guards reported his absence, and the Emperor called Mercurius and asked him, "Is it true that you refused to worship the idols who helped us during the war?"

Mercurius answered with courage: *"Your Majesty, the victory was not due to idols made by human hands. It was accomplished by the grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who sent His archangel to give me a sword and strengthened me. I cannot deny my God and worship statues"*

The Emperor was infuriated, and tried to persuade him to no avail. Mercurius' faith was unshaken. Then the king ordered him to be thrown in jail. That did not stop the saint from praying and singing hymns in prison. During the night, Michael the Archangel appeared to him and told him: *"Do not be afraid of the tortures. Confess your faith in Jesus publicly because He is the only One able to save you"*.

The next morning, Decius' soldiers hung the saint between two poles so that they could hit him with sharp nails. They tried also to cut his body with sharp blades and burn it, but

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Mercurius endured all these tortures in silence. Back in jail, the archangel appeared and touched Mercurius' body. He was instantly healed. When the king saw that the saint was in perfect health, he attributed it to witchcraft. Mercurius told him that it was Jesus who is the true healer of the soul and the body.

Fearing a revolt because the people loved him, the emperor had him bound in iron fetters, and sent him to Caesarea. After Decius tried many different tortures without success, he decided to have him beheaded. Mercurius lifted up his arms and prayed fervently, asking the Lord to accept him in paradise. Then, suddenly, he saw Jesus Christ in a glorified vision, surrounded by many angels, saying: *"My chosen son, Mercurius, come to your eternal rest with the saints. Your prayers have risen up to Me like the aroma of good-smelling incense. Miracles will be performed in any church bearing your name. And I will save those who ask Me through your intercession. Whoever writes or reads the story of your life will have their names written in the Book of Life"*.

Then, after he was blessed, Mercurius was so happy that he ran to his executioners, begging them to carry out the king's orders immediately. Then he knelt down and said, **"Lord, do not count this sin against them."** Mercurius was beheaded on 5 December 250AD. He was only **25** years old.

Other traditions

After the end of the first persecution, the place of the saint's burial was revealed. Mercurius appeared to a poor man in the city, and told him that he was *Mercurius, the Martyr of the Lord*. **"My body is buried in Cappadocia Gardens, under the old house on the way to the royal palace. My body looks as white as snow, because Jesus was present at the time of my martyrdom"** said the saint.

The next morning, the man went to dig under the old house. He began to smell the scent of perfume, seeing the body of the saint. The news spread quickly and many people came to take a look at the blessed body. They moved it to the local church until they built a new church bearing his name, and St Mercurius' body was buried there with respect and devotion.

A twentieth century miracle

Various miracles have been attributed to St Mercurius. The following was told by the deceased Tamav Irene, who was Mother Superior of Abu-Seifein (St Mercurius) Convent in Old Cairo, Egypt.

Rafik (father) and Shahira (mother) did not have any children for several years. They prayed a lot to God in order to have children, asking St Marina for her intercession. God heard their prayers, and granted them a baby girl, whom they called Marina - after the name of St Marina. However, almost nine months after the child was born, the parents

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realized that their child is blind. They decided to take the child for medical examinations on her eyes, and all the diagnosis revealed that the child's retina has been missing. They tried to find out if the child can perform a retina transplantation, only to realize that medicine has not been able to reach this degree of progress yet. They tried visiting optometrists both in Egypt and in the USA, but with no chance of hope. The findings rendered the whole family miserable, and had nothing but praying that God would help them. Meanwhile, when the child's grandfather was once praying and tearing in front of Virgin Mary's icon, a nun came up to him and tapped him on the shoulder, and asked him to go to Abu-Seifein Convent, and there he will find the help he needs. The grandfather told the parents, and they took Marina to the convent as advised. There, they met Tamav Irene, the Mother Superior of the Convent at that time, which was when Shahira (Marina's mother) asked Tamav that she would pray to God to take the child's soul, rather than to live blind the rest of her life. Tamav Irene refused, and took the child, laid her on the back and noticed that her pupil was dilated, which was a sign of no response to light, and lack of eyesight. She then put the case, which had the relics of Abu-Seifein (St Mercurius), on top of the child's forehead and started praying. As she prayed, the case began growing heavier, to an extent that she could not lift it alone. One of the family relatives noticed and asked Tamav Irene to help her in lifting the case. He too realized that the case was growing heavier. A few minutes later, some motion began to take place on inside the case, which was the indication that Abu-Seifein (St Mercurius) is present. Tamav Irene then noticed that the child's pupil started to respond to light, and so, she knew that the child could see now. However, she chose not to tell the parents at that point, but asked them to go again to all the optometrists they have visited before, do one more checkup, and not come back again without medical records from those doctors detailing the current situation. The parents hopelessly took the child back home, and put her in her bedroom. But when they turned on the lights, they noticed that the child instantly looked at the light source. The parents couldn't believe what they saw, and started performing some experiments to know if the child can really see. Of course, the child was able to see, but still the parents did as told by Tamav Irene, and took her to the doctors for a final checkup and to obtain the medical records. Similarly, the doctors could not believe what they saw, and considered this to be a miracle by all means. After visiting the optometrists, the parents brought the medical records back to Abu-Seifein Convent, detailing that a brand new retina had been created for the child's eyes granting her the gift of normal vision till this day. May the prayers and supplications of the great saint Abu-Seifein be with us all. And **Glory is to God, forever Amen.**

