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Father Matthew of the Poor

The Story of a Coptic Holy Man

Matta El Meskeen, also known as Matthew the Poor, was born on September 20, 1919, in Banha, (although some say Damanhur), Qalyubia Governorate, Egypt. Born as Youssef Iskandar, he would later embark on a journey that would shape the course of Coptic monasticism. His origins, however, remain disputed, as some sources suggest his birthplace to be Damanhur, Egypt. Youssef's studies led him to the University of Cairo, where he graduated in Pharmacy in 1944. This period saw the rise of a prosperous lifestyle, with ownership of two pharmacies, two villas, and two cars. Amid this success, a profound inner calling led him to renounce his material riches in 1948.

In 1951, the now known as Father Matta El Meskeen, was ordained as a priest against his own will. He sought solace in Saint Samuel the Confessor Monastery. For the next few years, he resided here, immersing himself in the spiritual heritage of the Desert Fathers.

The late 1950s witnessed Father Matta's transition to Wadi El Rayan, where he assumed the mantle of a recluse, emulating the ancient hermitic practices of the Desert

Fathers. For twelve transformative years, he lived a life of solitude, spiritual introspection, and devotion.

By the dawn of the 1960s, Father Matta's spiritual odyssey attracted like-minded individuals, resulting in the formation of a small community. This enclave, numbering seven monks by 1960, expanded to twelve by 1964 under his guidance. These twelve monks, handpicked by Pope

Kyrillos VI, were destined to play a vital role in rejuvenating the Monastery of St. Macarius the Great.

In 1969, he was appointed to the Monastery of St Macarius in the revered Wadi El Natrun. This marked the inception of a profound revival of Coptic monasticism. By the time of his passing, the community had blossomed from a mere six aged monks to a thriving assembly of 130, a testament to his leadership and spiritual guidance.

During this period, Father Matta and his twelve companions embarked on an ambitious journey of reconstructing the Monastery of St. Macarius the Great. While tending to the needs of the frail fathers who resided nearby, they undertook a revival of the monastery. This included re-starting agricultural practices, the

establishment of institutional frameworks, and even the development of printing and publishing facilities.



In the spiritual landscape, Father Matta's influence extended beyond his monastic community. He served as the spiritual guide for notable figures like Pope Shenouda III, the Alexandrian priest Father Bishoy Kamel, and Coptic historian Iris Habib Elmasry. Besides his spiritual gifts, he was also an extensive writer which resulted in a prolific body of work that spanned 181 books and numerous journal articles, exploring biblical exegesis, ecclesiastical rites, and theological intricacies.

Despite his transformative impact, Father Matta faced moments of challenge and controversy. Allegedly suspended twice from positions within the Coptic Church, his viewpoints on church-state separation and theological matters stirred debates. Nonetheless, his legacy remained unshaken, with his teachings continuing to resonate with followers both within and beyond the Coptic Church.

Although his earthly journey concluded on June 8, 2006, Father Matta El Meskeen left behind a legacy that transcends time. Metropolitan Mikhail of Asyut aptly captured him as "a brilliant scholar, a turning point, a new level of writing and literary activity through the long period of his monastic life." The life of Father Matta El Meskeen stands as an embodiment of spiritual transformation, monastic renaissance, and profound theological insight that continue to inspire generations.

“Christ does not intend just to hear our pious prayers and worship; but He intends to intervene in our schooling, our fights with others, our problems with the government, our problems at work, and everything else. He is the great architect and builder of our lives—in the little things just as much as in the big.” – Fr. Matthew of the Poor

“Therefore, beloved, when we approach to eat the Body of Christ, each of us approaches as an individual; but after having eaten, no longer think of yourself as an individual person! You have become a member in the Body. Once I have partaken of the Eucharist, I am united to Him; and so no longer am I just "me". All of humanity is collected into a single person in Christ. Mankind itself began with a single person, and it will be completed in a single Person. Otherwise, the dispersing effects of sin and the fall would be permanent. But Christ came to overcome such dispersion and separation; He came to gather the separate into one.” – Fr. Matthew of the Poor

ORDINATION OF A DEACON

Rev. Mr. Gary Cornett, SSM Ordained

On February 11, 2023, the Superior General visited the Parish Church of St. Jerome in Tulsa, Oklahoma. During his visit, he ordained the Reverend Mr. Gary Cornett, SSM a deacon. He also confirmed three members of St. Jerome's! It was a special occasion marked by fellowship and prayer. Thank you to the folks at St. Jerome's for their always gracious hospitality, and to the pastor, Canon Joshua Shawnee, SSM.



NEWS FROM HOLY NAME OF MARY

Updates from Northeast Pennsylvania

Canon Daniel Storrs, SSM continues his hard work in Towanda. In joyful news, the chapel has incorporated as a parish community and Canon Daniel has received his faculties to continue serving as its priest. He is ably assisted in this work by his associate pastor, known affectionately as “Fr. William.”

The work of the community has included promoting Child Abuse Awareness month (photos below), a baptism, continuing aid to hungry neighbors, and beginning a prayer group with the Paul Reynolds Senior Apartments in Troy, PA.



The priests of Holy Name of Mary Chapel stand in solidarity against child abuse!

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SUPERIOR GENERAL VISITS UNITED KINGDOM

A Trip Abroad

Our Superior General visited the United Kingdom in May. During his time, he was able to visit Old Roman Catholics as well as friends. His travels took him to the London area, Surrey, Hampshire, Cambridgeshire, Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Manchester, Hertfordshire, and Wiltshire! He also had the opportunity to visit Archbishop Mathew’s grave, which is shown below.

