

**AN
ELDER
SAID...**



**Edifying Stories
and Teachings from
Ancient and Modern Times**

■ “...that one lay down his life for his friends”

An Astonishing Example of “Greater Love”*

The Voluntary Martyrdom of the Holy Monk Leo the Cappadocian

During the reign of the Emperor Tiberius (578-582), we visited Oasis, where we encountered a monk that hailed from Cappadocia, who was great in the eyes of God. His name was Leo. Many people told us a multitude of wondrous stories about him.

Spending some time with this holy man and becoming well acquainted with him, we were greatly edified, and especially by his humility, quietude, non-acquisitiveness, and his love for all.

This ever-memorable Elder told us: “Believe me, my children, I am going to be sovereign.”

We said to him: “We assure you, Abba, that nobody from Cappadocia ever became Emperor; this thought of yours is mistaken.”

But he simply repeated: “Without a doubt, children, I am going to be sovereign,” and nobody could persuade him to put aside the thought.

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Now then, when the Maziques arrived and pillaged the entire region, they came to Oasis and slew many monks, taking many others captive.

From the Lavra, they also took Abba John (an ordained Reader at the Great Church in Constantinople), Abba Efstathios the Roman, and Abba Theodore. All three of them were ill at the time.

When they had been captured, Abba John said to the barbarians: “Take me to the city and I will persuade the Bishop to give you twenty-four pieces of gold.”



So one of the barbarians led him off and brought him near the city. Abba John went to the Bishop. At that time, Abba Leo was also in the city together with some of the other Fathers, which is why they had not been captured.

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Abbas John arrived and began to implore the Bishop to give the money to the barbarian, but the Bishop only had eight pieces of gold. They wanted to give these to the barbarian, but he would not take them, saying: “Either give me twenty-four pieces of gold or the monk.”

Those in the fortress thus had no choice but to hand over Abba John, who wept and groaned, to the barbarians, and they took him away to their tents.

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Three days later, Abba Leo took the eight pieces of gold and went out into the desert, to the place where the barbarians were camped.

He pleaded with them, saying: “Take me and these eight pieces of gold and free the others; they are sick and can not work for you and you would only have to kill them. But as for me, I am healthy and can serve you.”

The barbarians took him and the eight pieces of gold and let the others go free.

Abbas Leo went with the barbarians a certain distance, but when he collapsed in exhaustion, they beheaded him. Thus did Abba Leo fulfill that which is written in the Scriptures: “Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.” Then we understood what he meant when he would say that he was going to be sovereign. For sovereign he was, having laid down his life for his friends.

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The measure of love is to love your neighbor “as yourself.” To love your neighbor “more than yourself” is “**greater love.**”

Christ was the first to show this **greater love** when He “died for our sins.”

Abba Leo also showed this **greater love** by sacrificing himself on behalf of the captives.

We come across such rare love in mothers, in those fighting for their [Faith and] homeland, and in the Saints.

A mother sacrifices herself for the sake of her children, a soldier sacrifices himself for the sake of his country, and Saints sacrifice themselves for the sake of sinners. ◻

(* *The Spiritual Meadow*, John Moschos, ch. 112 (Cistercian Publications, Kalamazoo, Michigan, 1992), pp. 92-94. Layout and editing ours. ● Concluding comments by Bishop A. of E.

