

## "I Fell Father, What Do I Do Now?"

A brother confessed to Fr. Sisois (sis-sow-es): "I fell, Father. What do I do now?" "Get up," the holy elder told him, with his characteristic simplicity. "I got up, Father, but I fell again into the cursed sin," the brother confessed grievously. "And what prevents you from getting up again?" "Until when?" asked the brother. "Until death finds you, whether standing or falling down. It is written, 'wherever I shall find you,' the elder explained. Just pray to God that you are found at your last moment standing upright in holy repentance."

St. Sisois, 429 AD, (July 6) was an Egyptian by birth. He first lived with monastics. Later, he spent sixty years living in the desert on the same mountain that St. Anthony had. He was a fount of living wisdom and was sought by monks for advice and guidance. His insightful response given to the novice has been continually repeated over the years by spiritual fathers.

The instruction to never fail in "getting up" until the day of death is foundational to the Churches understanding of repentance. It is because of this that each year we are invited to engage once again in the School of Repentance known as Great Lent. This opportunity for renewal and growth is pre-announced three weeks before, beginning with the Sunday of the Publican and the Pharisee (Feb. 20, 2000\*), the Sunday of the Prodigal Son (Feb. 27, 2000\*), the Sunday of the Last Judgement (March 5, 2000\*) and the Sunday of Forgiveness (March 12, 2000\*). (\* Note these dates change each year based upon the date of Pascha.)

The recording of the death of St. Sisois proved that he lived by what he said. "This same abbot Sisois sitting in his cell would always have his door closed. But it was told of him how in the day of his death, when the fathers were sitting around him, his face shone as the Sun, and he said to them, "Look, the abbot Anthony comes." And after a little while, he said again to them, "Look, the company of the prophets comes." And again his face shone brighter, and he said, "Look, the company of the Apostles comes." And his face shone with a double glory, and he seemed as though he spoke with others. And the old man asked him, saying, "With whom are you speaking, Father?" And he said to them, "Behold, the angels came to take me, and I asked that I might be left a little while to repent." The old man said to him, "You have no need of repentance, Father." But he said to them, "Truly, I do not know if I have clutched at the very beginning of repentance." And they all knew that he was made perfect. And again of a sudden his face was as the sun, and they all were in dread. And he said to them, "Look, behold the Lord comes, saying, 'Bring me my chosen from the desert.'" And straightway he gave up his spirit. And there came as it might be lightening, and all the place was filled with a sweet smell. This vision of the death of saint Sisois struck fear in the hearts of the monks and renewed within their hearts the imperative to repent. As the church opens the door to the school of repentance to us, may we take heed to St. Sisois' teachings and wisdom. He taught the following:

- If Tempted Give yourself over to the will of God.
- Know that the temptation comes because of our sin.
- If Something good happens:
- Acknowledge that it is by God's providence.

How can we please God & be saved? - Withdraw from the world. Separate from creation and draw near to the Creator. Unite to God with prayers and tears. And rest will be found in this world and the next.

How is humility acquired? - By regarding everyone as better than us.

What is needed? - Purity of mind, to speak from this purity and to place one's hope in God.

You may have noticed that the icon of St. Sisois depicts him over a grave with bones.

The inscription is translated,

"The great ascetic Sisois before the grave of the Hellene, Alexander, who in olden times shone with glory, is horrified, and feeling sorrow over the inconsistency of time and the temporary nature of glory, cries: Seeing thee, O grave, I shed a heartfelt tear. I remember the common debt. How shall I go through such an end? O death who can escape thee?"

The historical circumstances that surrounded depicting St. Sisois at the grave of Alexander the Great was the Turkish oppression of Greece. They felt all temporal glory was gone and the only hope of glory was to be found in God's kingdom. The death of St. Sisois served to inspire in the hearts of the Orthodox that only Christ's glory is lasting, only his life is life, only his kingdom is everlasting. May we also be so inspired.

In Christ Love,  
+Fr. Andrew