

Fr. Abdel-Messih El Makari El Manahry
“A Fool for Christ”

*Then Jesus told His disciples, “If anyone would come after me,
let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.” (Matthew 16:24)*

What does it mean to be a fool for Christ? If Christ is the Wisdom of God, then certainly His followers should be models of wisdom after Him, shouldn't they? Denying this wisdom in favor of foolishness for Christ's sake seems nonsensical until we consider St. Paul's words, “Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God” ([1 Cor 3:18](#)). Fools for Christ, therefore, undertake an ancient and trying form of asceticism where they act out their love for Christ by behaving like madmen. They do this to conceal their true virtue and pursue their sanctification in Christ. By behaving like fools, they ironically live out the wisdom of God. The story of Fr. Abdel-Messih El Manahry is one such story.

Although reports of his early life are fascinating, this portion of the story begins when the young man, Simon, finally obtains his father's permission to pursue monasticism. Having been divinely called to this vocation, he was tonsured with the name Abdel-Messih in the year 1914 in the monastery of St Macarius the Great (Abu-Maqar) in the wilderness of Shiheet/Scetis (Wadi El-Natroun). He was raised under the guidance of Hegumen Abdel-Messih El Baramosi and his brother Hegumen Jacob. Having been a laborer all his life up until that point, he took to the labors of monasticism and quickly excelled in virtue. The envy of the devil, however, could not be far from such an aspiring holy ascetic warrior. Therefore, to avoid the sin of pridefulness, his elders encouraged him to become a fool for Christ.

Following the advice of his elders, this saint became known for expressing a desire for marriage, saying outlandish things, acting in a crazed manner, and behaving very foolishly. All of this was done to conceal his immense piety and austere ascetic labors. On one occasion, the patriarch at the time, Pope Youannis XIX, had heard of the young monk's virtue and wanted to appoint him to the episcopate. Fr. Abdel-Messih, however, had other plans. Upon their meeting, this saint feigned madness and acted like a crazy person in front of the Pope. The Patriarch had no choice but to expel him from the Papal residence.

After some time, Fr. Abdel-Messih was instructed to step down from the monastery to continue living as a fool for Christ. The saint complied with his elder's instruction and settled in the village of El Manahra. There he built for himself a cell out of unplastered mud bricks. Disdaining the vanity of the world, he left the inside unpainted. This is where the saint fought his many battles with Satan.

Fr. Abdel-Messih continued to behave like a madman and a fool in public, but in private he carried on many intense ascetic labors. His life was characterized by extreme humility and generosity. He memorized doxologies and would keep repeating them through nightly vigils. In between doxologies he would offer repentance and ask God, with tears, to forgive him his sins and any offences he might have caused others. He would also remain in prayer for weeks at a time. He did this by attaching a rope to the ceiling of his cell then tying the other end to his waist to catch him if he fell asleep. He would only eat one small meal a day and had a deep affection for the poor and needy; he generously gave away all his possessions.

God saw fit to grant him the gift of performing miracles. He healed the sick, foresaw future events, and was able to be in multiple places at once. He even foreknew the day of his departure. On Palm Sunday in the year 1963, Fr. Abdel-Messih prophesied that he would be crowned and rejoice on the Feast. The people dismissed this statement as one of his foolish remarks. Yet, true to the Lord's word, this great ascetic reposed the following week, on April 14th, 1963—the Glorious Feast of the Resurrection. May his prayers and blessings be with us all.

Sources

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- [Fr Abdel Messih El-Makari, St-Takla.org](#)
- [On being a fool for Christ, Today's Catholic](#)
- [What is a "Fool For Christ" in Orthodoxy?, YouTube](#)