



16. March 2026

LENTEN SPIRITUAL RETREAT

Day 27: “Saint Abraham and His Niece, Saint Mary”

Since today’s Gospel recounts the cleansing of the Temple once again, and we already explored this theme on the seventh day of our Lenten journey (<https://en.elijamission.net/day-7-resist-evil-in-the-holy-spirit/>), I have decided to dedicate today’s meditation to two saints whose feast day is celebrated on March 16: Saint Abraham of Edessa (Mesopotamia) and his niece Mary.

From a very young age, Abraham longed for a life of solitude with God, so he asked his parents for permission to become a hermit. However, his parents had already chosen a young woman whom they considered worthy to be his wife. With great regret, Abraham obeyed them. Legend has it that after the wedding, he told his wife of his decision to live in permanent abstinence. Later, he left secretly and shut himself away in a solitary cell located about an hour from the city of Edessa.

God’s call to solitude was so strong that all his family’s attempts to bring him back to his wife were in vain. He walled up his cell, leaving only a small window through which he received the necessities of life.

He then devoted himself to a very ascetic life dedicated to God for fifty years. When his parents died, they left him a great fortune, which he entrusted to a pious friend to distribute among the poor and orphans. Meanwhile, the fame of his holiness spread, and people flocked from all over to see him and hear his sermons, full of anointing, wisdom, and grace.

At that time, near Edessa, there was a small but densely populated city whose inhabitants still practiced idolatry. None of the missionaries who had been sent there had managed to kindle the light of the Gospel in that deep darkness, and the only fruit they reaped from their labor had been to suffer countless abuses. The bishop of Edessa, who had long desired the conversion of that region, decided to make a new attempt. For this reason, he set his sights on Abraham, who enjoyed a great reputation for holiness. Despite Abraham’s resistance, the bishop ordained him a priest and entrusted him with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel to this stray flock. As he made his way there, the saint entrusted his task to divine protection.

As he approached the city, he saw the smoke rising from the sacrifices to the idols. He shed many tears over the blindness of the people and redoubled his fervent prayers. As soon as he arrived, he began to preach the message of Jesus, but no one wanted to listen to him. Yet this did not discourage him, and no matter how much the pagans mistreated him and drove him away, he returned each time with the same fervor.

Three years passed in this way. Finally, Abraham's patience and gentleness moved the idolaters. They reflected on the attitude of this man, which seemed incomprehensible to them, and concluded that he must be acting under divine inspiration. Little by little, they all renounced their superstitions and asked for baptism. For a whole year, Abraham devoted himself to strengthening them in the faith; then he left fervent ministers in charge of them and returned to his cell.

When Abraham's brother died, leaving behind a very young daughter named Mary, the saint took her in and built a hut next to his own to introduce her to a pious life. Mary willingly accepted his guidance and began to lead a virtuous and exemplary life of penance. However, a man soon arrived who posed as a monk and pretended to have come to seek Abraham's counsel. He then seduced Mary, leading her into impurity. At first, Mary could not find her way back to God; she fell into despair, moved to another city, and gave herself over to a sinful life.

Abraham, who did not know what had happened to his niece, wept bitter tears over her misfortune and pleaded with God in constant prayer for her conversion. It was not until two years later that he learned where she was. He then set out in disguise and revealed himself only once he was alone with her. He said: *"Mary, my daughter, Mary, do you recognize me? What has happened to the angelic mantle of your virginity? How have you fallen into the abyss of vice, my beloved daughter? Why did you not confess your fall to me? I would have helped you return to God's grace."*

And gently he continued to encourage her: *"Do not despair; I will take upon myself your sins. Only believe me and return to your solitude! There is nothing shameful in being knocked down in the struggle, but it is dishonorable not to get back up. Cast aside your mistrust, for all men can fall; it is a consequence of their natural weakness. Think only of seeking the help of divine grace. God does not desire the death of the sinner, but that he may be converted and live."*

These words moved Mary so deeply that she returned with her uncle to her life of solitude with God. She spent the last fifteen years of her life fervently practicing all the virtues. God graciously accepted her penance, and three years after her conversion, He

even granted her the gift of working miracles. Finally, she died the death of the righteous. Saint Ephrem, who saw her body before it was buried, declared that her face shone with glory and that, without a doubt, a multitude of angels had carried her soul to the eternal dwellings.

Saint Abraham lived another five years in his hermitage, and it is said that miracles occurred simply by touching his clothes.

Saint Mary's name appears in the Greek calendar, while Abraham's appears not only in the Greek calendar but also in the Latin and Coptic calendars.

Now, what lesson can we draw from this wonderful story for our Lenten journey? When the Lord calls, our vocation must take precedence over everything else so that great fruitfulness may arise. If we serve the Lord in evangelization, we must be persevering and imitate the patience and meekness of Saint Abraham. If we see that someone is straying from the path of virtue and is even in danger of losing their vocation, we must fight spiritually for that person. Finally, if we stumble on our journey of following the Lord and suffer defeat in the struggle it entails, we must get back up and trust in God's mercy.

The flower we gather today is to pray with perseverance for those who have fallen into the slavery of sin.

Meditation on the reading of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/a-time-of-rejoicing-is-coming/>

Meditation on the Gospel of the day: <https://en.elijamission.net/giving-the-right-place-to-signs-and-miracles/>