February 4

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The forty-nine elders of Scetis (d. 444) monks and martyrs

Today the Coptic Church commemorates the forty-nine martyrs of Scetis.
During the first centuries of the Church, Coptic monks often fell victim to Berber attacks from the desert. In the larger Egyptian semi-anchorite communities, monks began to build shelters where they could take refuge when the predators arrived and remain out of sight for several weeks. Under the emperor Justinian in the sixth century, all large monasteries were equipped with towers and drawbridges.
It is not certain whether a similar form of defense existed at the monastery of St. Macarius in the fifth century. In any case, tradition has it that after countless Berber invasions, forty-nine monks decided to give voluntary witness to their faithfulness to Christ, even to the point of bloodshed. Fully aware that they had already died with Christ, and that through their monastic profession they had accepted to become martyrs, they did not seek to escape violent death. At the site of their burial, a church was built and named after the forty-nine martyrs of Scetis. It is cherished by all Coptic monks, because it reminds them of the communion in prayer that always exists between the saints of heaven and earth.

A READING

The relationship between daily Christian life, monasticism and martyrdom is already inscribed in baptism, that first vocation that guides Christians in whatever paths they might later follow, that entrance into Christ's death and resurrection that alone gives them their identity. This is a truth that has been forgotten often during the long centuries of "Christendom," in which society - that is, Christian civilization - determined where one belonged from the time of one's birth, and provided the criteria that determined one's identity.

From Enzo Bianchi, *Stronger than Hatred*

BIBLICAL READINGS
Heb 12:3-14; 1 Pet 4:12-19; Acts 8:3-13; Mt 4:23-5:16

THE CHURCHES REMEMBER...

ANGLICANS:
Gilbert of Sempringham (d. 1189), founder of the Gilbertine order

COPTS AND ETHIOPIANS (26 tubah/terr):
The forty-nine elders of Scetis, martyrs
Anastasia of Scetis (6th cent.), nun (Coptic Church)

LUTHERANS:
Rabanus Maurus (d. 856), scholar and bishop of Mainz

MARONITES:
Isidore of Pelusium (d. ca. 433), monk

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANS AND GREEK CATHOLICS:
Isidore of Pelusium, monk

EAST SYRIAN ORTHODOX:
John de Britto (d. 1693), missionary and martyr (Malabar Church)

OLD CATHOLICS:
Oscar (*Ansgar*; d. 865), bishop and missionary