

## Hidden and Quiet (Katherine Johnson)

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**It's the end of the day and toys strewn all over the floor. No clear path to set my feet upon. Dishes arch high in the sink and I just notice the hint of smoke. And now the dinner's burned beyond saving. I hear the phone ringing, along with the storm brewing in the back of the house, one that needs my attention.**



I stop. Stop to shut out the thought of it all, the moment's demands. Just stop and shut my eyes. Let the burning wave pass over.

Breathe deep.

With that breath I remember their story. The one about the two women, married to brothers. How they reached spiritual heights unknown to desert dwelling saints.

Of course, you don't hear stories like this every day. But that's not to say that things like this don't happen. It's only that this kind of ladder from earth to heaven,

the domestic one, it's all hidden and quiet.

And I'm thinking about their story as I breathe calm, eyes shut. These two women, how they lived unknown, tucked away in the heart of a home. How we only know about them because God revealed them to a great saint. And no one even knows their names.

But we do know their story and I often tell it to myself.

One night in prayer, the desert dweller Macarius hears a voice from heaven. One that whispers words hushed about two women living unnoticed. And just hearing about hidden saints sends him searching for the righteous homemakers. This man, Macarius, known to raise the dead through his prayers, now leaves the desert, searches long to find two simple women living, not in the desert or a monastery, but in the home.

He knocks on their door and they welcome him warm and kind. And then he puts the question to them, the one he's traveled on foot all these long miles to ask. Would they be so good as to share with him their great works? Share the manner of their holy lives, concealing nothing, so that he might learn from them?

And he wanted to know these things, the manner of their living, because the voice from heaven had told him that these two women had reached spiritual heights that he had not yet attained. This saint, the disciple of the great Anthony of the desert. Macarius who held his staff, the one who'd received a double portion of his spirit. And still he hadn't reached the heights of two ordinary women working out their salvation in the midst of the home.

The women answer him meek and surprised. They say they have no virtue. That their lives are just simple ones, only occupied with domestic work and fulfilling the vows of marriage. They try to convince him that they have no great works to reveal. And Macarius presses them, wants to really know the manner in which they live. And finally they reveal the hidden ways of their home.

For fifteen years they'd lived as the wives of two brothers, all living in one home. And never once in those years had they uttered harsh words to one another. Because they'd made a vow to bring the blessing of the desert to the oasis of the home. To avoid loud, worldly conversations and remain at home as much as possible, concerning themselves with running their households.

The saint of the desert leaves these two saints giving glory to God who shows no partiality. Because He bestows His grace on the monastic and the married, only

considering the inclination of the heart.

And I can still hear the bickering coming from the back of the house and the smell of burnt food and this hidden struggle to find grace in a life few people even consider to be a real one.

I keep breathing, not yet opening my eyes. And I think about their story.

How gentle words and a quiet peace transform a home into heaven on earth. God's grace.

My eyes open and I look at this messy floor and it's then that I find the sure footing. Running a household with heart centered on God, love resting in family. How this all bears the fruit that the wisest of men seek. Hidden and quiet and nothing worth mentioning. And still encountering God.

This sink filled with dishes and this laundry basket overflowing. The child who needs rocking and a husband who needs a heart quiet and listening at the end of a long day.

How the great saints raise the dead, but the home is the place where hearts are raised.

Because somehow, by His grace, the roof of this hidden and quiet home, the one you drive by and probably never take notice of. If you have eyes to see, this humble roof becomes the vault of the heavens. Dome echoing God's presence.

Still, small.

Hidden and quiet and He's with us.

*You can read more about the life of St. Macarius of Egypt, the 4th century desert father, and his meeting with these holy housewives on <http://ocafs.oca.org/FeastSaintsLife.asp?FSID=100226>*

*This article was originally posted on site «Evlogia» on January 20, 2011 and is posted here with permission.*

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