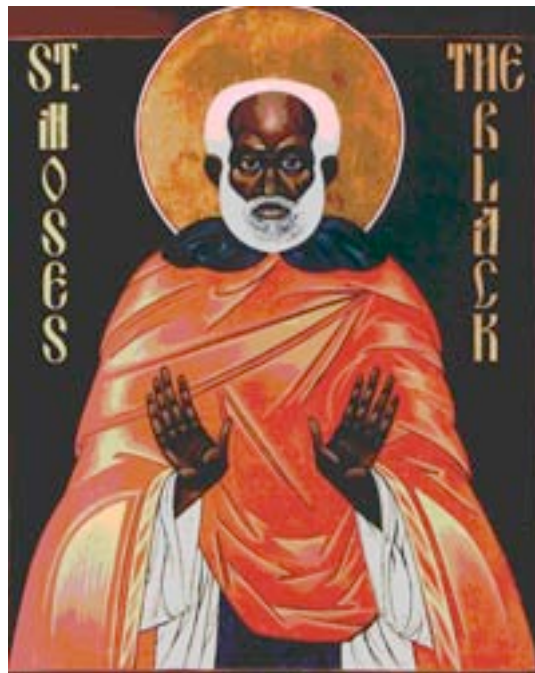


## Moses the Black, Desert Father and Martyr (330-405)

*Observed 28 August*



Moses the Black, or Moses the Ethiopian, is one of the extraordinary Desert Fathers of Egypt in the early years of Christianity. He does not have the typical life story one comes to expect of saints, with a precociously devout childhood and remarkable self-forgetfulness. Moses by contrast, an Ethiopian slave of an Egyptian government official, was sent away from his post for suspicion of theft and murder. He then took up the life of a bandit, gathering a band of outlaws who regularly attacked homes and travelers alike. At one point Moses sought to elude capture by legal authorities by hiding among a community of monks. While staying with them, he was so impressed by their personal contentment and their simple, generous lives that he became not only a Christian, but himself a monk, choosing to spend his own life in contemplation and simplicity in the desert. The monks offered him the sacrament of baptism and welcomed him into their community. He not only left the crimes of his previous life, but also became a great model and advocate of nonviolence. Moses was frustrated by his inability to achieve perfection of discipline and contemplation, but his awareness of both his past sins and his current imperfection made him extraordinarily compassionate toward his fellows and therefore an accepted leader among them. He won many to the faith during his years in the desert and was eventually ordained

a priest. Several times during his long life among the hermits of the desert, Moses had occasion to deal with bands of robbers (such as he had once been) and always refused to allow any sort of answering violence by the monks, because such was clearly against the teachings of Christ. There are many inspiring stories of his self-forgetful and courageous confrontations with those who offered him and his fellow monks harm. Not surprisingly, a number of the men thus greeted with love and peace, followed Moses from a life of banditry to a life in the community of the faithful. Today he remains an inspiring icon of how an individual can be totally transformed by relationship with Christ, and of the power of faithful nonviolence.

*Lessons*        II Chronicles 28:8-15; Psalm 86:1-13; Acts 22:6-21; Luke 23:39-43

*Collect*        God of transforming power and transfiguring mercy: Listen to the prayers of all who, like Abba Moses, cry to you: "O God whom we do not know, let us know you!" Draw them and all of us from unbelief to faith and from violence into your peace, through the cross of Jesus our Savior; who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.