

Week 2.

- Have you ever been to a desert environment? What was it like?
- Read Luke 4: 1-13
- How was Jesus' time in the desert an empowering & positive experience?
- How do you cope with 'desert spaces' in your life ie. times where nothing is happening or life seems very bleak?

The desert Fathers (Abbas) & Mothers (Ammas) lived in individual 'cells' (often caves in the mountains) & met to break bread together on the Sabbath, thereby forming loose knit communities.

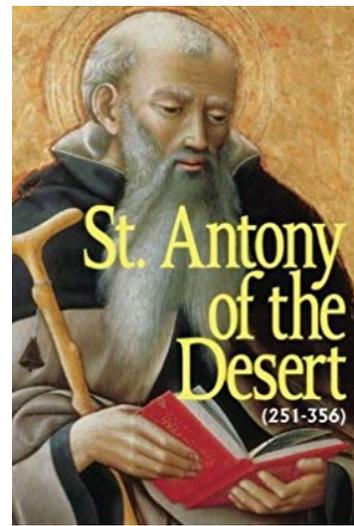
- Why do you think they chose to live in such an inhospitable environment?

'Desert solitude & deep listening take us beyond self-reliance & extends the boundaries of our experience & vision of ourselves & life itself.'
*[Keller]

- Do you agree with Keller's statement?

The Fathers & Mothers grew in wisdom & love of God which they then shared with those who visited them.

- What might we learn from their experiences that can reasonably applied to our lives today?
- How disciplined is your life? Do you have any sort of structure that helps promote spiritual growth? Would you find that helpful?
- Think about some of the 'sayings' overleaf - there are over a 1,200 recorded & attributed to 27 Abbas & 3 Ammas.
- Spend some time in quiet reflecting on how you might apply something you have learnt from today's Notes.



Desert Fathers & Mothers.

The men & women who lived in the Desert looked to practice their faith in a transformative way through discipline and obedience to God. They developed unique insight and wisdom through their lived experiences which we have access to in the form of their various 'sayings'. Some may seem very odd to us and bear much reflection and contextualisation.

Thomas Merton describes these people as those 'who did not believe in letting themselves be passively guided & ruled by a decadent state....[they] primarily sought their "true self, in Christ" and sought a way of God that was uncharted and freely chosen, not inherited from others who had mapped it out beforehand'.

[Wisdom of the Desert : Merton : p.5-6]

Primary sources for this Series :

The Desert Fathers ; Saint Anthony & the Beginnings of Monasticism : Peter H Gorg : Ignatius Press : 2011

Becoming Fire ; Through the Year with the Desert Fathers & Mothers : ED. Tim Vivian : Cistercian Publications : 2008

Desert Banquet ; A Year of Wisdom From the Desert Mothers & Fathers : David G.R Keller : Liturgical Press : 2011

Recommended Read :

Desert Fathers & Mothers ; Early Christian Wisdom Sayings Annotated & Explained : Christine Valters Painter : Skylight Illuminations : 2012



Abba Antony

‘I no longer fear God, but love him. For love casts out fear.’

‘Our life and death is with our neighbour. If we gain our brother, we have gained God, but if we scandalise our brother, we have sinned against Christ.’

Abba Poemen

‘Teach your mouth to say what is in your heart.’

‘Let go of a small part of your righteousness and in few days you will be at peace.’

‘A man may seem to be silent, but if his heart is condemning others he is babbling ceaselessly. But there may be another who talks from morning till night and yet he is truly silent; that is, he says nothing that is not profitable.’

An old man

‘Just as a tree cannot bear fruit if it is often transplanted, neither does a monk bear fruit when he moves from place to place.’

When one of the fathers saw someone sinning, he wept bitterly and said, ‘This fellow today and me tomorrow.’

‘The person who stores up injuries and resentments and yet fancies that he prays might as well draw water from a well and pour it into a cask that is full of holes.’

Amma Sarah said, ‘It is good to give alms for people’s sake. Even if it is done only to please people, through it one can begin to please God.’

Amma Syncletica

‘Just as the most bitter medicine drives out poisonous creatures, so prayer joined to fasting drives evil thoughts away.’

It was said of Abba Agathon that for three years he placed a stone in his mouth until he had succeeded in keeping quiet.

Abba Moses of Skete

‘Whenever the gaze strays even a little, we should turn back the eyes of the heart into the straight line towards [God].’

Abba Nilus

‘Do not be always wanting everything to turn out as you think it should, but rather as God pleases, then you will be undisturbed and thankful in your prayers.’

‘Happy is the monk who thinks he is the outcast of all’

