

## The Cloud of Witnesses

1 Corinthians 9: 24-27 – “Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? Run in such a way as to get the prize. Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.”

### Antony and the Desert Fathers & Mothers



- Lived from 251 to 356 AD in Egypt
- Born into a wealthy family, he renounced his wealth and went alone into the desert to pursue a life of prayer and virtue.
- The verse that changed Antony’s life was Matthew 19:21 – “If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me.”
- His biography, *The Life of Antony*, written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century by Athanasius, became one of the most influential books of all time and helped launch the Christian monastic movement worldwide.
- He is known as “The Father of All Monks,” and was described as “a man of joy and of a settled state of soul.”
- The Desert Fathers and Mothers include many men and women from the 3<sup>rd</sup> through the 5<sup>th</sup> centuries who renounced their former lives, fled into the wilderness, and lived lives of fasting, prayer, spiritual warfare, and the pursuit of holiness.

Abba Antony: “Let us not think, as we look at the world, that we have renounced anything of much consequence, for the whole earth is very small compared with the kingdom of heaven....Therefore let the desire for possessions take hold of no one, for what gain is it to acquire these things which we cannot take with us? Why not rather get those things which we can take away with us—things like prudence, justice, temperance, courage, understanding, love, kindness to the poor, faith in Christ, freedom from anger, and hospitality? If we possess these virtues, we shall find them preparing a welcome for us there in the land of the meek-hearted.”  
(*Life of Antony* 1.17)



Abba Poemen: “A man will be always tripped up by that thing which he will not cut off from himself.”

When Abba Macarius returned to his cell one day, he found a man stealing his belongings. He reacted calmly and helped the thief load his donkey with the objects from his cell. As the thief departed, Macarius recited the words of Job: “The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

Abba Agatho: If an angry man raises the dead, God is still displeased with his anger.”

A young man came to Abba Macarius and said, “I want to become a holy man by tomorrow’s end.” Macarius smiled and said, “To be a holy man, what you must do is this: Spend the day at the cemetery, cursing the dead. Throw sticks and stones at them, call them names—whatever you can think of. Spend the whole day doing nothing but that.” So the young man went and did as Abba Macarius had said. When he returned at the end of the day, Macarius asked him what the dead had said in response to his abuses. “Nothing,” the young man replied. “They’re dead.” So Macarius sent him back the next day and told him to spend the entire day doing nothing but praising the dead. “Call them righteous men and women, compliment them, say everything wonderful you can imagine.” So the young man went out and spent the next day complimenting the dead. When he returned, Macarius asked him again how the dead had responded. “They didn’t say a word,” said the young man. “Ah,” Macarius replied. “They must be holy indeed. You insulted them, and they did not answer. You praised them, and they thought it of no account. Go and do likewise, my friend, taking no account either of the scorn of men or of their praises. And you too will be a holy man.”

Abba Antony: “Don’t be afraid to hear about virtue....The Greeks travel all over the earth and cross the seas in their quest for knowledge. But we have no need to depart from home for the sake of the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for the sake of virtue....For it is not far from us, nor is it outside of ourselves, but the quest for virtue is within us, and is easy if only we are willing.” (*Life of Antony* 1.20)