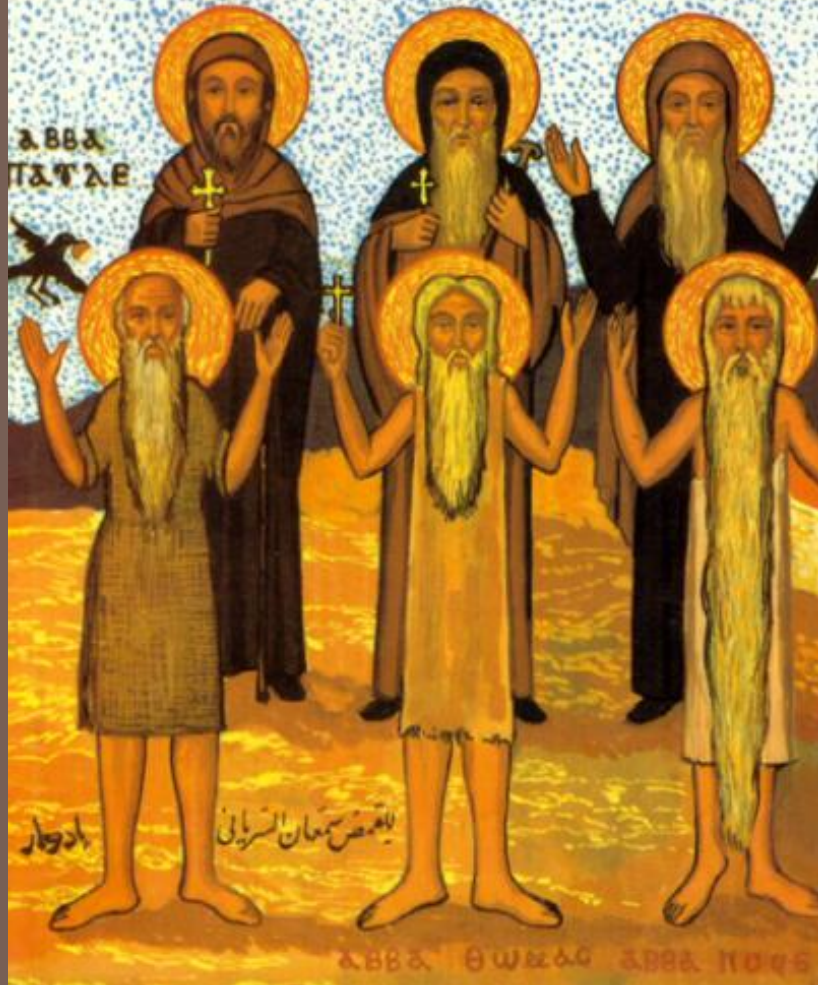


# The Hermit Fathers

by

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ἈΒΒΑ ΠΙΣΑΝΑ ἈΒΒΑ ΚΑΡΟΣ ἈΒΒΑ ΣΑΛΙΟΝ



# THE HERMIT FATHERS

## □ WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SOLITAIRE AND A HERMIT?

### □ Abba Issac said:

"Usually a **hermit** begins as a **monk** living in a monastic **community**, progressing to the life of **solitude** (in his cell). He stays alone and keeps silent all week, only coming out of his cell on Sundays to attend the Holy Mass and meet with his fellow brothers. Then he **leaves** the monastic **community**, taking shelter as a solitaire in a **cave**, and lastly **leaves** the **cave** to be a **lover of solitude**, venturing into the inner **wilderness**."

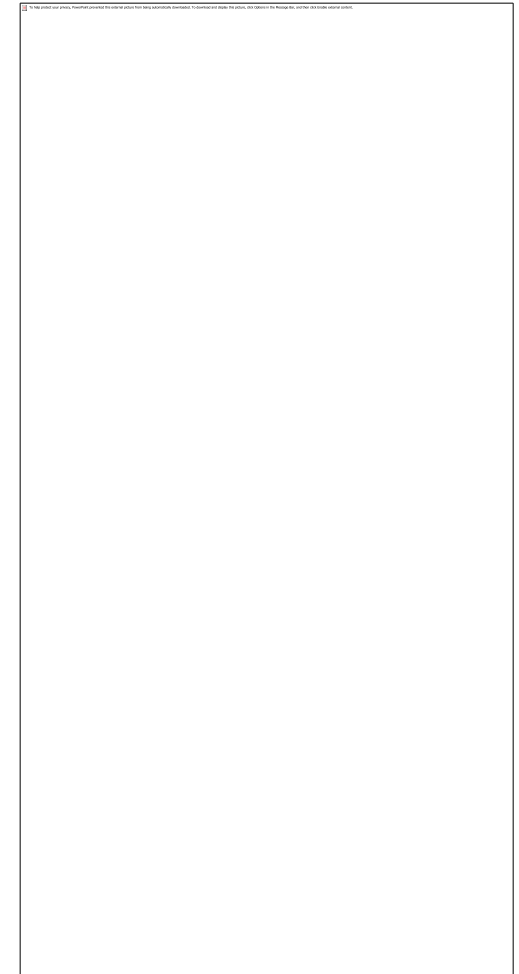
- **The Historical Background** The great centre for monasticism was Egypt. By 400 AD Egypt was a land of hermits and monks. There were three main types of monasticism there, corresponding very roughly to three geographical locations.

- **Lower Egypt** - the hermit life
- **Upper Egypt** - coenobitic (communal) monasticism
- **Nitria and Scetis** - groups of ascetics

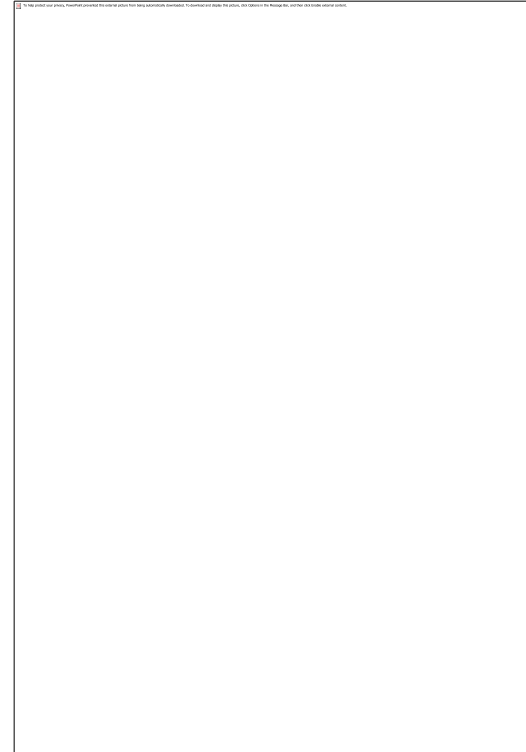


- **The hermit life - Lower Egypt.** The prototype of the hermit life was St. Anthony the Great, a Copt and a layman. He was the son of wealthy Christian parents. One day in church, he heard the saying of Jesus: 'Go, sell all you have and give to the poor and come and follow Me,' as a commandment addressed to himself.

He is regarded as the 'father of monks'.



- **Coenobitic (communal) monasticism** - Upper Egypt. The move to fully communal monasticism also takes place in Egypt. St Pachomius, a Christian hermit living beside the Nile at Dandara from about AD 320, persuades others to join him in what is effectively a village of anchorites.
- St Pachomius writes a 'rule' by which each community must live and worship, thus forming the basis for coenobitic monasticism (from Greek *koinos* 'common' and 'bios' life).





- **Nitria and Scetis** -(Wadi El Natrun) groups of ascetics. At Nitria, west of the Nile delta, and at Scetis, forty miles south of Nitria, there evolved a third kind of monastic life in the 'lavra' where several monks lived together, often as disciples of an 'abba'. Nitria was nearer to Alexandria and formed a natural gateway to Scetis.



St Macarius the Great , The Lamp of the Desert

## □ Primacy of love

In the sayings of the Desert Fathers, there was insistence on the primacy of love over everything else in spiritual life. Without love the exercises of the spirit lose all meaning. They understood that it is very hard to love others in the full sense of the word and that it involved a kind of death of their own being.

**I love those who love me, and those who seek me find me. - Proverbs 8:17**



## □ Purity of heart

The basic principle of the Desert Life was that God is the Authority, and that apart from His presence will there are few or no principles. The Desert life started out with a clean break from the world. The end of all striving was purity of heart which culminated in a clear unobstructed vision of the true state of affairs and an intuitive grasp of one's inner reality anchored in God.

**Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**  
Matt 5:8

## □ Hesychasm

(From the Greek word for "stillness, rest, quiet, silence") can refer to inner or outer stillness, though in The Sayings of the Desert Fathers it referred to inner tranquility. It typically involves the repetition of short prayers, often silently and inwardly, particularly the Prayer of the Heart, or Jesus Prayer.

**Be still, and know that I am God - Psalm 46:10**

## □ Meditation

The lives of the desert fathers were saturated with the recitation of scripture. During the week they chanted psalms as they performed manual labour, and during the weekends they held liturgies. They also practiced silent meditation, along with the meditative prayer of hesychasm, which was practiced in silence and with eyes closed.

**But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. Psalm 1:2**

## □ Withdrawal from society

The legalization of Christianity by the Roman Empire in 313AD actually gave St Anthony a greater resolve to go out into the desert. When members of the Church began finding ways to work with the Roman state, the Desert Fathers saw it as a compromise between "the things of God and the things of Caesar."

**Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed.-Mark 1:35**

- The vows taken by a monk are:  
Chastity, Poverty, Obedience, and Stability  
(solitude)

What drives these 'normal' people into the wilderness?

What vow will you make today?



Monks' cells in the Wilderness [Wadi Qelt]