

# WISDOM FROM THE DESERT

## Additional Handouts for the Spiritual Life of the Leader

Once two brethren came to a certain elder whose custom was not to eat every day. But when he saw the brethren he invited them with joy to dine with him, saying: Fasting has its reward, but he who eats out of charity fulfils two commandments, for he sets aside his own will and he refreshes his hungry brethren.

Abba Pambo questioned Abba Anthony saying: What ought I to do? And the elder replied: Have no confidence in your own virtuousness. Do not worry about a thing once it has been done. Control your tongue and your belly.

Abba Anthony said: Just as fish die if they remain on dry land so monks, remaining away from their cells or dwelling with men of the world, lose their determination to persevere in solitary prayer. Therefore, just as fish should go back to the sea, so we must return to our cells, lest remaining outside we forget to watch over ourselves interiorly.

A brother came to Abba Pastor and said: Many distracting thoughts come into my mind, and I am in danger because of them. Then the elder thrust him out into the open air and said: Open up the garments about your chest and catch the wind in them. But he replied: This I cannot do. So the elder said to him: If you cannot catch the wind, neither can you prevent distracting thoughts from coming into your head. Your job is to say no to them.

It was said of one of the elders that he persevered in a fast of 70 weeks, eating only once a week. This elder asked God to reveal to him the meaning of a certain Scripture text, and God would not reveal it to him. So he said to himself: Look at all the work I have done without getting anywhere! I will go to one of the brothers and ask him. When he had gone out and closed the door and was starting on his way an angel of the Lord was sent to him, saying: The 70 weeks you fasted did not bring you any closer to God, but now you have humbled yourself and set out to ask your brother, I am sent to reveal the meaning of that text. And opening to him the meaning which he sought, he went away.

Amma Syncletica of holy memory said: There is labour and great struggle for the impious who are converted to God, but after that comes inexpressible joy. A man who wants to light a fire first is plagued by smoke, and the smoke drives him to tears, yet finally he gets the fire that he wants. So it is written: Our God is a consuming fire. Hence we ought to light the divine fire in ourselves with labour and with tears.