

LIFE OF ANTONY

by St. Athanasius of Alexandria

*Translation from the Coptic Introduction
by Tim Vivian*



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with Introduction and Notes*

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THE COPTIC LIFE OF ANTONY *

Translated, with an Introduction, by Tim Vivian

Introduction: Hearing God's Call

Hearing God's call, monks give up many things--property, possessions, family, friends--to live a life devoted to Christ. They are Christianity's true fundamentalists: fundamentalists because they take the Gospel literally, at its word; true because their *intention*--they are, after all, human--is to practice, in love, the fundamentals of the Christian faith: prayer, hospitality, charity. The fundamental virtues of monasticism are love, compassion, and humility, all Gospel virtues, all made flesh most completely by Christ, in monastic tradition the first monk.¹

The *Life of Antony* offers us a vision of monasticism made flesh in Antony. It represents, to be sure, an ideal vision, and an idealized monk,² as though in the United States George Washington had been chosen by a contemporary to represent not only the beginnings of American democracy, but also its consummation and highest achievements, before democracy even had much of a history or had shown its staying power.

Though idealized, the *Life of Antony* is, nevertheless, true--true both to the wider history of early monasticism and, more importantly, to the self-understanding of the early monks.³ Antony was not the first monk; the *Life* itself tells us that: when Antony embraced the ascetical life, monks were already practicing asceticism "a little ways" outside of their villages; an old man in Antony's own village "had practiced asceticism from his youth"; Antony entrusted his sister "to some faithful women. . .so that she would live in virginity" (all chapter 3).⁴

Antony's importance is not so much that he was the first monk--he wasn't--but that he came to define the nature of monastic and Christian spirituality for his own generation, and for succeeding generations of Christians--not just monks. Recent studies have shown that this definition given to us in the *Life of Antony* can not be written off as "mere" hagiography or dismissed as an implausible glorification of an ideal: the Antony who lives and breathes in these pages is true--demons and all--to the way the early monks lived, thought, and believed; he is also true to the way the monks saw and understood their vocation, both as a calling (*vocatio*) and as a way of life (*politeia*).⁵

Central to Antony's calling to the monastic life is scripture. The beginning of the *Life* does present Antony too neatly, a child adult, too serious to play like the

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

Since the reign of King Solomon (970 B.C.) the high priests of the Jews have been descendants of Zadok the first high priest in the Temple. Things changed during the Seleucid rule over Palestine, when in 171 B.C. those foreign rulers disregarded this Jewish tradition and started appointing high priests who were not descendants of Zadok, sometimes not even from the tribe of Levi. Those high priests who often obtained the office by bribery no longer cared for the religious or moral duties of the office, nor did they represent the Jewish people; they rather cared for the interest of the Seleucid crown. Onias III the last high Zadokite priest in the Jerusalem Temple at the time was murdered. His son Onias IV, the rightful high priest, fled to Egypt where for two hundred and thirty years the legitimate Zadokite high priesthood was perpetuated among the Jewish diaspora. In this issue Dr. Boulos Ayad reviews the historical and archaeological data concerning *The Jewish Temple* built by Onias IV in lower Egypt during the second century B.C. Dr. Ayad is Professor of Archaeology at the University of Colorado and is a frequent contributor to this journal.

In this issue Coptic Church Review will start a series of articles on the lives of the Coptic New Martyrs who have recently died for their faith. *Father Ruais Fakher* was one of the early martyrs of the present persecution in which the Coptic Church is crushed between governmental pressure and Islamic militants. More than one hundred Christians have lost their life, including several priests. Many others have been tortured and churches and properties have been burned in the present wave of violence in Cairo and Upper Egypt.

Editor

other kids (ch. 1). But after his parents' death the story becomes more realistic. Left in charge of his home and younger sister, Antony one day is walking to church: "While he was walking, he considered how the apostles gave up everything and followed the Savior" (see Mt 4:20, Lk 14:33) (ch. 2). This thought leads him to think of the Christian community depicted in Acts, where everyone gave up their possessions and gave to those in need (Acts 4:34-5). "Pondering these things in his heart, he went into church and it happened that the Gospel was being read; he heard the Lord saying to the <rich man>, 'If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give them to the poor, and come and follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven' (Mt 19:21)." So Antony does as the Gospel asks; he gives up everything to follow Christ.

Such renunciation--and embracing--certainly had a wider social context than the *Life* presents. But Antony's central motivation in the passage is simple: he obeyed, literally, the words of Christ. As Armand Veilleux has pointed out: "all the motivations that [the monks] themselves revealed to us in their writings came from Scripture. Do we have a right to pretend we know their secret motivations better than they did?"⁶ Hearing the Gospel, really hearing it, prompts Antony to act: "All his desire and all his attention he directed to the great effort of asceticism" (ch. 3).

The rest of the *Life of Antony* is, really, a telling of this single-mindedness: Antony's goal is to be a "lover of God" (ch. 4); in order to do this, he must not allow himself to be distracted--drawn away--from God. That is what the myriad demons are--distractors: they draw us away from God. Whether they are "physical" or "psychological" is irrelevant; they are real. Sometimes the whole purpose of our modern era--whether expressed in communism, capitalism, materialism, scientism--seems to be to draw us away from God. Television has only exacerbated the situation so acutely observed fifty years ago by Aldous Huxley:

But it is upon fashions, cars and gadgets, upon news and the advertising for which news exists, that our present industrial and economic system depends for its proper functioning. For . . . this system cannot work unless the demand for non-necessaries is not merely kept up, but continually expanded; and of course it cannot be kept up and expanded except by incessant appeals to greed, competitiveness and love of aimless stimulation. Men have always been a prey to distractions, which are the original sin of the mind; but never before today has an attempt been made to organize and exploit distractions, to make of them, because of their economic importance, the core and vital center of human life. . . .⁷

Early monasticism--represented well by the *Life of Antony*--offers a striking and uncompromising opposition to "greed, competitiveness and love of aimless

stimulation": asceticism. But today asceticism often conjures up images of dirty and emaciated men wearing hair-shirts and flogging themselves. The monks themselves, however, defined asceticism very differently (ch. 3).⁸ For them asceticism was really very simple: working and spending--something *The Wall Street Journal* would approve of! But it was working and spending as defined by the Gospel, not Wall Street: Antony worked with his hands, and "he would spend what he earned from his handiwork rightly: he would spend part on bread and part on those in need." At the heart of monasticism--and Christianity--the individual is linked with the community and the salvation of every other person. Most importantly, Antony "prayed all the time, having learned that it is necessary to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5:17)." The action of the monastic life, then, is prayer, prayer without ceasing, prayer not divorced or cordoned off from work and the rest of life, prayer as life and life as prayer. Some monks, in obedience to the Gospel, had others pray in their stead while they slept.

The monks valued such single-mindedness. Antony, like many others, was a model of monastic determination. The *Apophthegmata*, or *Sayings* of the desert fathers and mothers, preserve a saying by Antony in which he teaches a young monk in an unforgettable way about the seriousness of his calling:

A brother renounced the world and gave his goods to the poor, but he kept back a little for his personal expenses. He went to see Abba Antony. When he told him this, the old man said to him, "If you want to be a monk, go into the village, buy some meat, cover your naked body with it and come here like that." The brother did so, and the dogs and birds tore at his flesh. When he came back the old man asked him whether he had followed his advice. He showed him his wounded body, and Saint Antony said, "Those who renounce the world but want to keep something for themselves are torn in this way by the demons who make war on them."⁹

The demons did--and do--wage war, silently and noisily, quietly and violently, relentlessly. As Huxley pointed out, and as we can read in the newspaper each morning and witness in our neighborhoods each day, they have only intensified their efforts in the modern era. But the *Life of Antony* offers a vision of the demons defeated, the community and its citizens at peace (ch. 4). This vision, based as it is on Luke's depiction of the early Christian community in Acts 4:32, is an idealization, but it is an idealization with its roots planted deeply in the desert earth where nothing grows. That earthly paradox lies at the heart of the *Life of Antony*: This work--and the lives of the first desert monks that it portrays--envision the desert "filled with monks" (ch. 4). Only those filled with the love of God could imagine--and live--such an impossibility. They continue to offer possibility to us.

The Text

The text used for this translation is that edited by G. Garitte, *S. Antonii Vitae Versio Sahidica* (CSCO, Scriptorum Coptici Series Quarta, Tomus I; Paris: 1949). Square brackets ([]) indicate words that have been added; elongated brackets (<>) indicate emendations to the Coptic text, most by G. Garitte, but some by the present translator. In the translation offered here I have not supplied textual notes and explanations, which are numerous, nor have I noted the many places where the Greek and Coptic texts differ; for these, consult Tim Vivian, trans., *The Coptic Life of Antony* (San Francisco: Catholic Scholars Press, Summer 1994).

THE COPTIC LIFE OF ANTONY

*The Life of Our Holy Father Abba Antony the Anchorite
Which Abba Athanasius, Archbishop of Alexandria, Set Down for Us
in a Letter that He Wrote to the Brethren in Foreign Lands.
He Went to His Rest on the Thirtieth of January.*¹⁰

Prologue¹¹

You have entered into a good contest¹² with the monks of Egypt, having determined in your heart to make yourselves their equal or surpass them in the virtue of your ascetical practice.¹³ Moreover, you now have monasteries,¹⁴ and the name "monk" is in current use¹⁵ among you. Such zeal gives everyone cause for praise, and through your prayers God will bring it to fulfillment. Since you have <also> asked me about the way of life of the blessed Antony, wishing to know how he began his ascetical practice and who he was before this undertaking, how he came to the end of his life and if the accounts concerning him are true, so that you yourselves might seek to emulate him, I have received your request with great enthusiasm. For me, too, it is very good and beneficial just to remember Antony, the man of God. I know that you yourselves, when you hear about Antony, will marvel at that man and yourselves want to emulate his character, for Antony's life provides an excellent model for monks as they practice their asceticism. Do not, therefore, be skeptical about what you have heard concerning Antony from those who have spoken to you. Store up in your hearts, rather, just the few things you have heard from them, for even these people have barely begun to tell you what they could report.

As for me, because you have persuaded me, I will relate to you in this letter a few things that I remember about that man, setting them down in writing for you. But as for you, do not stop seeking out each and every person who comes to you from where he lived; even when each person tells you what he knows, the accounts

will barely do him justice. It was my desire, when I received your letter, to send <for> some monks who often went to see him so I could learn their accounts more fully and write to you with assurance. But since the season for sailing was coming to a close and the person carrying these letters was in a hurry to get to you, I therefore wrote down for you the things I know--for I saw him often--and the things I heard when I followed him a few times and poured water over his hands.¹⁶ I have endeavored to write these things down for your piety¹⁷ with great regard for the truth in every detail so no one will be skeptical after hearing too much or, on the other hand, hear fewer words than he should and hold the man in contempt.

THE LIFE OF SAINT ANTONY**Antony's Origins**

1. Antony was an Egyptian by race. His parents were well-born, for they had many possessions and, since they were Christians, from his childhood Antony advanced also in the Christian life. He was raised by his parents and so knew nothing besides them and life at home. When he grew and advanced in age, he did not wish to continue his writing lessons, wishing to stand apart from the ordinary activities of children. His whole desire was, as it is written,¹⁸ to remain in his home without deceit. He would join his parents in church and he was never recklessly playful like a child, nor was he contemptuous while growing up; instead, he obeyed his parents and observed their wishes and he would keep in his heart what was profitable from them. Moreover, although he had many possessions as a child, he did not pester his parents for all kinds of food nor did he look for the pleasures associated with them. He was content with what he had and never looked for anything more.

Antony's Call to the Ascetic Life

2. After his parents' death, Antony was left behind with his little sister and at eighteen or twenty years of age had to take good care of his home and his sister. Six months had not passed since the death of his parents when, as was his custom, he left the house and went to church. He was reflecting on their wishes and gave his full attention to them. While he was walking, he considered how the apostles gave up everything and followed the Savior.¹⁹ There were those who sold their possessions, as it is written in Acts: They brought them and laid them at the feet of the apostles so they could give them to those in need.²⁰ And he reflected on what sort or what kind of hope there is for them in heaven.²¹ Pondering these things in his heart, he went into church and it happened that the Gospel was being read; he heard the Lord saying to the <rich man>,²² "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all your possessions and give them to the poor, and come and follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven."²³

Now Antony, when he received the remembrances of the saints²⁴ from God

and reckoned in his heart how that passage had been read for his sake, immediately left that church, and the possessions that his parents had left him (there were three hundred very prosperous acres), these he freely gave away to the people of his village so they would not bother him or his sister about anything. All the rest of his lesser possessions he sold and, collecting a great amount of money, gave it to the poor. He kept a few things for his sister.

Antony Embraces the Ascetic Life

3. When he entered the church again and heard in the Gospel the Lord saying, "Do not be concerned about tomorrow,"²⁵ he could no longer bear it; he immediately went out and gave his remaining²⁶ things to the poor. His sister he entrusted to some faithful women, knowing that they were virgins, so that she would live in virginity. He for his part left his household and devoted himself from then on to ascetic practice, disciplining and strengthening himself. For there were not yet many monasteries at all in Egypt and no monks knew yet the further desert, but each one who wished to would attend to himself, going outside of his village a little ways, and he would practice ascetic discipline by himself.

Now there was an old man in that village who had practiced asceticism from his youth, living the life of a monk. When Antony saw this man, he emulated him in goodness and he began also by at first remaining there outside his village. And if he heard about anyone who was serious about following good practices, he would go and search out that man like a wise honeybee and would not return to his own place unless he had seen that man. He was like someone who had received from that man provisions for traveling the road to virtue.

Living at first in that place, he resolved that he would not return to see the things of his parents, nor would he think of his relatives. All his desire and all his attention he directed to the great efforts of asceticism. He worked with his hands, for he had heard the scriptures say, "He who does not work, let him not eat."²⁷ And he would spend what he earned from his handiwork rightly: he would spend part on bread and part on those in need. He prayed all the time, having learned that it is necessary to pray without ceasing.²⁸ Indeed, he paid such close attention to what was read in church that nothing in the scriptures escaped his notice. He kept everything in his heart, with the result that in his heart memory took the place of books.

4. Thus Antony conducted himself and he was loved by everyone. He was obedient in a sober and serious way to those who devoted themselves to ascetical discipline; going to them, he would consider in his heart the ascetical practice of each one and the good spiritual formation and devotion of each. He saw that one was filled with grace²⁹ and that another was strong in ascetic discipline; another he saw powerful in prayer while another was never angry and another loved all of humanity. One would pass the night in prayerful vigil and another would read

well. He marveled at one's patient endurance and another's fasting and sleeping on the ground. He watched closely the gentleness of one and observed the patience of another. With one accord they all scrupulously held on to their godly worship of Christ and their love for one another.³⁰

He considered all these things in his heart and, filled with all these things, returned home to his own ascetical practice for God. He embraced in his heart all the things he had seen in each one and strove to manifest all of them in himself. He was not one to quarrel with those of his own age except that he would not be inferior to them in good works but would manifest in himself what was better. And he would do this without causing them sadness; rather, he would cause them to rejoice all the more for him. Everyone, then, in the village, and all the conscientious people with whom he associated, would call him "God-loving" when they saw his example. Some would greet him as "son," and others as "brother."

The Devil's First Attack on Antony

5. The Devil, who hates and envies what is good, could not bear to see such zeal in this young man, so he now undertook to do to him those things that he customarily concerns himself with doing. First, he attempted to lead him away from his ascetical practice, casting into him memories of his possessions and his guardianship of his sister, longing for family and kin, love of money, boasting, the pleasure in eating many kinds of food, and the other satisfactions of life. Finally, he cast into his heart the difficulty of virtuous living, how great its hardship and manifold its sufferings, and he displayed for him the body's weakness and the many years required to attain perfection, and he raised up in him a great dustcloud of thoughts for him to consider, wishing to separate him from his righteous thoughts.

When the Enemy saw him, and saw that he himself was powerless before Antony's will and that he was being badly defeated by the strength of that man and that he was being thrown to the ground because of Antony's unceasing prayers, he then armed himself with the weapons upon his navel.³¹ Armed with these, and gloating over them (for these are the arrows he prefers to cast first against the young), he advanced to fight against Antony, disturbing him at night and bothering him so much that [even those who were watching]³² could see that there was a fight being waged between the two of them.

The Enemy hurled foul thoughts at Antony, but he drove them back through prayer; the Enemy raised up pleasurable desires in him, but Antony, ashamed of them, fortified his body with faith and fasting. And the Devil took on the form of a woman at night and imitated all of a woman's ways in order to deceive Antony. But thinking about Christ in his heart and the intellectual vision³³ of his soul, he extinguished the Devil's coals. But the Enemy once again cast into him the desire for pleasure, but Antony, as though he were angry and grieving, considered in his

heart the threat of fire and the worm that works its devices there. All these things happened to the shame of the Enemy, for he who thought "I will be able to fight against God" was mocked by Antony. For working with him was the Lord who bore flesh for us and gave victory to his chosen ones against the Devil so that each of those who struggle can say, "It is not I but the grace of God that is in me."³⁴

6. Finally, then, when the dragon was unable to cast Antony down, he became angry at himself and gnashed his teeth at Antony.³⁵ Becoming deranged, he appeared to him in the illusory form of a young black boy. He became like one mad and, using a human voice, said to Antony, "I have deceived many like you, and I have brought down a multitude. Just now I did my utmost against you, as I have done to others." Antony asked, "Who are you saying these words to me?"

Immediately the Devil cried out in a powerful voice, "I am the friend of fornication. I am the one who possesses its traps and desires, waging war against the young. They call me 'the spirit of fornication.' How many wanted to live wisely, and I deceived them! How many were quietly patient, and I deceived them by casting into them daily preoccupations! I am the one whom the prophet accuses on account of those who have fallen: 'They have been led astray by a spirit of fornication.'³⁶ I am the one who led them astray. On account of me they fell. I am the one who harassed you so often, but up to now you have defeated me."

Antony gave thanks to the Lord and, summoning up his courage, he said, "You will succeed all the more in becoming despised; for you are black of mind and you are like a small child, without power. From now on, I will have no anxiety about you. 'The Lord is my helper, and I shall look upon my enemies.'³⁷ When he heard these words, the Enemy immediately fled, trembling before them, and he was afraid to approach Antony at all.

Antony's First Ascetical Practices

7. This was Antony's first contest with the Devil; or, rather, it was the Savior's victory in Antony. For he who took on flesh from the virgin Mary condemned sin in the flesh in order that the justification of the Law might be made manifest in us who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.³⁸ Antony, however, did not become neglectful or arrogant, as though the Devil had fallen beneath his feet. Nor did the Enemy, when defeated, stop setting traps but, like a lion, was prowling around looking for an opportunity to attack Antony.³⁹

Antony learned from the scriptures that the tricks of the Enemy are numerous, so he practiced his asceticism even more, thinking in his heart that although the Enemy had not been able to trap him in any way with bodily pleasures, he would not stop tempting him but would try to trap him by means of some other pretext. For the Devil is a lover of sin, especially against the saints.⁴⁰ Antony subdued his body, making it a slave,⁴¹ so that he would not, after conquering some temptations, be drawn into others and be deceived by them. He made plans to enter into an

even more difficult and demanding regimen of ascetical practice, and many marvelled at him but he endured the pain and hardship with ease.

The eagerness within his soul endured for such a long time that it created in him a good disposition so that when he received even small suggestions from others, he showed great enthusiasm for <them>. He would often pass the night in vigil without sleeping, and he would do this not once or twice but many times, and people would marvel greatly at him. Now he would not eat each day until after the sun had set, but oftentimes he would eat every second or fourth day. His food was bread and salt and water. It is not necessary even to speak of meat and wine, for nothing of this sort is found among those who are zealous. A mat would suffice for him to sleep on and often he would just sleep on the floor. He took care not to anoint himself with oil, saying that it was more fitting for young people to bring forth in themselves asceticism with eagerness and not to seek after those things that the body relies on, but to <accustom it> to difficulties, thinking⁴² about what the Apostle said: "When I am weak, then I am strong."⁴³ For Antony used to say, "The mind of the soul is strong when the pleasures of the body are weak." And truly people used to marvel at this other principle of his: he did not wish to measure the path to virtuous thought by time, nor withdrawal from the world⁴⁴ for its own sake, but by one's love and intention. So he did not count time that had passed, but each day, as though beginning his asceticism anew, he produced in himself great progress, meditating continually on what the Apostle says: "We are forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead."⁴⁵ He would also remember the voice of Elijah the Tishbite who said, "The Lord lives, the one before whom I stand today."⁴⁶ He observed that in saying "today," he was not counting time that has passed but was always laying a foundation, endeavoring each day to stand before God and to attain an acceptable form in order to appear before God pure in heart and prepared to obey his will alone, and no other. And he used to tell himself from the way of life of the great Elijah that it was necessary for ascetics at all times to know their own lives, as in a mirror.

Antony, Living in the Tombs, is Assaulted by the Devil

8. In this way Antony armed himself and went into the tombs that lay at a distance from the village. He remained there, asking one [of his friends] to bring him bread after a number of days. He went into one of the tombs and the monk⁴⁷ remained there alone, having closed the door on himself. The Enemy could not stand him being there; he was afraid that little by little Antony would fill the other deserted places⁴⁸ with ascetics. So he came out one night with a crowd of demons and beat Antony with so many blows that he remained lying on the ground, unable to speak because of the torturous blows. Indeed, Antony said with certainty that the pain from the blows was so great <that one would say> the blows came from powerful men inflicting tortures.

But by the providence of God--for the Lord does not <forget> those who trust in him--the next day his friend came with a little bread for him. When he opened the door, he saw Antony lying on the ground as though he were dead. Immediately he lifted him up and took him to the church in the village and laid him there. Now many of his relatives and people from the village were sitting and standing around Antony as though he were dead. But at midnight, when he regained consciousness and sat up, he saw that all of those around him were asleep and only that one fellow whom he knew was awake. He beckoned to him to come near and asked him to lift him and carry him once again to the tombs, and he woke no one.

9. So his friend took him and closed the door, and Antony remained inside by himself. He was unable to stand because of the blows from the demons, but he prayed while lying on the ground. And after his prayer he cried out, saying, "Look, here I am--Antony! I will not run from your blows; even if you do worse things to me, nothing will separate me from the love of Christ Jesus my Lord.⁴⁹ For it is written in the Psalms:⁵⁰ "Though war should rise up against me, my heart will not be afraid.'" These were the things the ascetic thought and said, but the Enemy, who hates everything good, was amazed that after all these blows Antony was still strong in heart and had returned again to that place.

The Enemy gathered together his dogs and, so angry he was about to burst, said to them, "You see that neither with the spirit of fornication nor with beatings have we been able to stop this man! Even worse, he has stubbornly opposed us! Let us, then, approach him by some other way." (Now these ways of the Devil are evil things.) That night, then, he worked such deceit that that place was shaken as by an earthquake that seemed to tear everything apart. The demons came inside, taking the shape of wild beasts and reptiles in a nightmare. Suddenly the place was filled with the illusory shapes of lions and bears and leopards and bulls and male and female serpents and wolves, and each one came toward him with a loud roar and hissing,⁵¹ according to its kind. The roaring lions wanted to leap upon him; the bull acted as though it would gore him; the snake struck, but did not reach him; and the wolf stalked towards him. All of these appeared together, and the sound of their roars and hissings was very fearful.

Antony, wounded by them, suffered terribly in his body, but in his soul he was even more vigilant and, while still lying on the ground, was strong and unafraid. He groaned because of the pain in his body, but he was in control of his thoughts and, as though he were mocking the demons, said to them, "If you had any power over me, just one of you would be enough against me, but because the Lord has destroyed your power, you attempt to terrify me with a mob. But you show your weakness because you imitate the forms of animals." Again he was courageous and said, "If you are able⁵² and have authority over me, don't stop but attack right now. If you are not able, why do you bother me in vain? For our seal and purity and wall of protection is our faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." So they

tried to do many things to him and they gnashed their teeth against him.

10. He looked up and saw that the ceiling appeared to be opening, and he saw what seemed to be a beam of light descending toward him. And suddenly the demons vanished and the pain in his body immediately ceased and the place where he was was restored to its former condition. Now Antony recognized that the Lord had saved him and when he took a breath he realized that he had been relieved from his suffering. He entreated the one who had appeared to him, saying, "Where are you? And why didn't you appear to me from the beginning so you could heal me?" A voice then came to him, saying, "I was here, but I waited to see your struggle. And now, since you persevered and were not defeated, I will be a helper to you forever and I will make you famous everywhere." When Antony heard these things, he stood and prayed, and he was so strengthened that he felt the strength return to his body. Now he was about thirty-five years old at that time.

Antony Leaves for the Mountain

11. The next day he went outside, joyfully worshiping God. He went to the old man, the monk⁵³ mentioned earlier, and asked him to go with him to worship the Lord in the desert. But that old man declined, saying it was both on account of his age and also because he had never practiced anything of this sort. Antony, however, immediately set out for the mountain,⁵⁴ but the Enemy saw his eagerness and, wishing to trip him up on the way, cast onto the road the apparition of a large silver dish. [But Antony] recognized the wiles of the hater of goodness and he stood and looked at the dish. He knew that it was a work of the Devil and said, "How did this dish get here in the desert? No path has been worn here before now, nor is there any traveler's footprint. If someone had dropped it he would have known it because it is large, and whoever lost it would have returned and looked for it and found it because this place is a desert. What has happened here is the work of the Devil. You will not trip me up by doing this, Devil! Instead, this will go with you to destruction!"⁵⁵ When Antony said these things, it vanished like smoke.

12. Afterwards, while he was walking on his way, he saw some gold, not in a fantasy, but truly. Whether it was the Enemy who showed it to him or whether a mighty power was training the <athlete> and showing the Devil that he was not tormented by money, he did not tell us, nor do we know what happened--only, it was truly gold that he saw. Now Antony marvelled at the quantity of gold, but he passed it by, fleeing as one flees fire; as a result, he did not take one step toward it.

He advanced closer and closer to the mountain. He saw a deserted <fortress> on the far side of the river, deserted so long that it was full of reptiles, and he made his home there. Now the reptiles there fled as though they were being chased out, and they moved away. Antony closed the door and laid away enough bread for six months (the Egyptians do this, keeping the bread with them for a whole year, and

no harm at all comes to it). He shut himself in⁵⁶ and had water with him, and he remained inside there alone; he did not go out, nor did he see those who came to see him. He did this a long time, living ascetically this way, twice a year lowering his bread down to himself from the rooftop.

13. Since those who came to see him knew that he would not allow them to come inside, they would <often> remain outside, spending days and nights at his doorstep. They heard what sounded like mobs inside creating a disturbance and making noise, raising their feeble <voices>, crying out and saying, "Get away from what belongs to us! Why are you living here in the desert? You will not be able to endure our treachery!" Now those who were outside at first thought that there were some men in there who had gotten inside to see him by means of ladders; then they looked inside through some holes, but did not see anyone. At that point they realized that those men were actually demons [and, becoming afraid, they were calling to Antony].⁵⁷ He heard them, but he was not concerned about them.⁵⁸ Antony came to the door and asked the men to go away and not be afraid, saying, "This is the way demons act, creating apparitions of this sort for those who are fearful. Protect yourselves with the sign of the cross and depart strengthened and encouraged, and leave them to mock themselves." So they went away, protected⁵⁹ by the sign of the cross.

Now Antony remained alone, and the demons could not harm him at all as he competed against them all the more. The <visions that continued> to come into his mind every day, and the weakness of the enemy who fought against him, gave him great relief from his sufferings and encouraged him towards even greater zeal. For indeed those who knew him would often go there thinking that they would find him dead, and they heard him singing, "Let God arise, and let his enemies be scattered; and let those that hate him flee from before him. Let them vanish as smoke vanishes; as wax melts before the fire, so let sinners perish from before the face of God."⁶⁰ And "All nations surrounded me; I drove them off in the name of the Lord."⁶¹

Antony Emerges and Inspires Others to the Ascetic Life

14. Antony spent almost twenty years practicing asceticism alone in this way; he did not go outside, nor was he often seen by anyone. After awhile, the consciences of many were pricked, and they wished to imitate him, and they forcefully tore down his door. Antony came out, and God was with him.⁶² This was the first time that he came out of the fortress and appeared to those who came to see him. And when they saw his body they marvelled at his sweetness, for he had not exercised yet he was not weak as though he had come out from fasting and fighting with demons; they found him just as they had known him before he withdrew.⁶³ They saw that the thought of his soul was pure, and he was not sorrowful and suffering; he had neither been disturbed by pleasures nor had laughter or sadness ruled

over him. Moreover, when he saw the crowd, he was not disturbed, nor was he delighted when they greeted him. Rather, he maintained complete equilibrium because reason was guiding him.

Now many of those there were sick. The Lord healed them through him because the Lord gave grace to Antony in his words. And he comforted the many who mourned while he reconciled others at enmity and made them brothers. He would tell everyone to honor nothing among the things of the world more than love for Christ Jesus. He taught each person about the good things that will come and about God's love for humankind which has come to us because God did not spare his own son, but gave him for all of us.⁶⁴ So he persuaded many to choose the monastic way of life and in this way monasteries⁶⁵ came into being in the mountains, and the desert filled with monks⁶⁶ and they lived there, having left their homes. They registered themselves for citizenship in heaven.⁶⁷

Antony the Good Father

15. Afterwards, he needed to go visit the brothers in Arsinoë. He crossed the Nile and the river there was full of crocodiles. But he prayed and forded the river along with those who were with him, and none of them were harmed. When he returned to his cell,⁶⁸ he embraced the holy labors which were full of all power. Speaking often to those who had become monks, he increased their zeal even more, and he stirred most of the brothers to a love of asceticism. His speech⁶⁹ attracted multitudes to him and many monastic cells⁷⁰ came into being, and he guided them all like a good father.

Antony Addresses the Monks:

About Persevering in the Ascetical Life

16. Now it happened that one day he went out and all the monks came to him and asked to hear a word⁷¹ from him, and he spoke these words to them in the Egyptian language: "The scriptures are sufficient for us to teach ourselves, but it is good for us to encourage each other in the faith and train ourselves with words. Now you yourselves compare yourselves to your father and you tell him what you know; I, for my part, because I am your elder in years, will tell you what I know and have accomplished. Let everyone have the same zeal together so that you will endeavor not to turn back and say, 'We have spent a long time in ascetic discipline.' Instead, as though we were beginning our work, let each of us increase <our>⁷² zeal.

"For the lifetime of humans is considered brief when compared to the age to come. Everything in the world is sold according to its value and things of equal value are exchanged, but the promise of eternal life is purchased for very little. For it is written: 'The days of our life are seventy years, and what is more than these is pain and suffering.'⁷³ When, therefore, we persevere in ascetical discipline for

these eighty or one hundred years, we will not reign for the equivalent of these one hundred years but instead of a hundred we will reign forever and ever. And although we have contested on earth we will not receive our inheritance on earth, but there are promises for us in heaven. And so when we lay down this perishable body we then will receive it back imperishable.⁷⁴

17. "Therefore, my children, let us not lose heart, and let us not think at all that what we are doing takes too much time or that we are doing a great thing: the sufferings of the present do not compare to the glory that will be revealed to us.⁷⁵ And let us not look at worldly things and think that we have given up great things, for indeed the entire earth is a small thing when compared with the heavens. If, therefore, we were lords of all the earth and renounced it all, once again that would not compare to the glory of the kingdom of heaven. For just as someone might look down on a copper drachma in order to gain a hundred gold drachmas, so he who is lord of all the earth and renounces it gives up little, and receives a hundredfold. If all the earth is not equal in value to the heavens, then he who gives up a little land gives up <nothing>; even if it's his house or great wealth, he has no grounds at all to boast or be aggrieved.

"We also ought to realize with regard to this that if we do not give up these things for virtue's sake, then later when we die we will give them up--oftentimes perhaps we give them up to those whom we do not wish to, as Ecclesiastes reminds us.⁷⁶ Why, then, will we not give them up for virtue's sake so that we can inherit a kingdom? On account of this, therefore, let none of us desire to acquire things for himself. What profit is there in these things if we possess what we will not be able to take with us? But on the contrary, why will we not give up these things and receive those things that are better, which we will take with us: wisdom, a holy dignity, a desire for justice, valor, the thought of a good heart, love that is strong, love of the poor, faith in Christ, freedom from anger, hospitality? If we possess *these* things, we will find them going before us, preparing a dwelling for us in the land of the gentle.⁷⁷

18. "Therefore, with these things in mind, let each person persuade himself not to lose heart, especially if he considers himself to be a servant of the Lord and that he ought to serve the Lord well. Because a servant will not be able to say to his lord, 'I worked yesterday so I will not work today,' nor will he calculate the time that has passed and stop working afterwards in the days ahead. But just as it is written in the Gospel,⁷⁸ he will show the same eagerness every day in order to please his lord and not fall into danger. In the same way let us also persist⁷⁹ in our ascetic practice every day, knowing that if we are negligent a single day he will not forgive us on account of what was done in the past but because of our negligence will be angry at us. So we have heard in Ezekiel the prophet;⁸⁰ so also concerning Judas: in a single night he lost everything he had worked for in the past.

19. "Let us, then, persist in our ascetic practice, my beloved, and not grow

weary at all, for we have the Lord who helps us in this, as it is written: 'Everyone who wants to do good God helps to do what is good.'⁸¹ Now with regard to losing heart, it is good for us to give our attention to the Apostle's statement: 'I die daily.'⁸² If we too live our lives like this--as though we were dying daily--we will not sin. Now I am saying this so that if we awaken daily and say to ourselves, 'I will not live until evening today,' and again, if we lie down and say, 'I will not awaken,' then our life will not seem so certain, reckoned daily as it is by the providence of God.

"Therefore, if we are like this and live this way, then we will not sin, nor will we desire anything, nor will we garner possessions for ourselves on the earth; but because each day we face the fact that we are going to die, we will not acquire anything for ourselves and we will give up all our possessions. The desire for women or filthy pleasure--we will not merely control them and turn from them, but we will turn ourselves completely away from them because they are transitory, as we forever struggle against them and look toward the day of judgment. For the great fear of <and> struggle against torments always destroys the beauty of pleasure and rouses the soul threatened with falling away.

*The Nature of Virtue*⁸³

20. "Having begun, therefore, and having set out on the path of virtue, let us press ahead even more⁸⁴ in order to attain the good measure.⁸⁵ And let no one turn back like Lot's wife,⁸⁶ for the Lord said, 'No one who puts his hand to the plow and turns back is fit for the kingdom of God.' Now this 'turning back' is nothing except a person feeling regret and thinking about things of the world. Do not be afraid to hear about virtue, and do not be surprised at the term: for it is not far from us, nor does it stand outside of us; no, its working takes place inside us. Now the Greeks leave home and cross the sea in order to be educated, but we have no need to leave home for the kingdom of heaven, nor to cross the sea for virtue. For the Lord has told us that 'the kingdom of heaven is within you.'⁸⁷ "All <virtue> needs, then, is for us to will it, since it is within us. For the soul possesses an intellectual part⁸⁸ as part of its nature; virtue stands within the soul and maintains its⁸⁹ nature when it remains as it was created: it was created good and upright. Therefore, Joshua the son of Nun commanded the people, saying, 'Incline your hearts to the Lord God of Israel.'⁹⁰ And John also said, 'Make your paths straight.'⁹¹ The soul is straight when the intellectual part of its nature is as it was created. But on the other hand, when it is bent and changed contrary to its nature, then we speak of the evil of the soul.

"Therefore the task is not difficult: if we remain as we were created, then we are in virtue; but if we think about what is evil, then we are judged as evil. If this were something that we had to acquire externally, it would truly be difficult; if, however, this is something within us, then let us be diligent concerning our filthy

thoughts. And since we have received the soul given in trust, let us protect it for our Lord, so he can acknowledge his work--that is, the soul--as being the same as he created it.

Concerning Demons

21. "Let us enter the competition, so anger will not rule us and desire conquer us, for it is written: 'Human anger does not produce the righteousness of God,' and 'desire, when conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is fully grown, gives birth to death.'⁹² With this way of life,⁹³ let us keep a secure watch, as it is written: 'With complete watchfulness keep your heart pure.'⁹⁴ For we have enemies--that is, the demons--and our struggle is against them, as the Apostle said: 'Our struggle is not against [flesh and] blood but against the rulers and the authorities and the cosmic powers of evil and the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.'⁹⁵ There's a great crowd of them in the air,⁹⁶ and they are not far from us. But there are great differences and variations among them, and to speak about their nature and differences would require a lengthy discourse; such a discourse should be spoken by others greater than us. Right now, however, it is necessary and imperative for us to understand fully the tricks that they do to us.

22. "First, then, we understand this: the demons that are called 'daimonion' were not created this way. For God never made anything [bad], but these too he made good. But when they fell from the thought of heaven, at that time they became wanderers upon the earth. The Greeks they deceived through apparitions, and they envy us Christians and disturb everything on our way in order to prevent us from reaching heaven so we won't enter the place from which they fell. Therefore we need great asceticism and prayer so that each person will receive progress and a gift and discernment of spirits and be able to understand which of them are less evil and which are the evil ones, and what kind of activity each of them is busy with and how to defeat each one and cast it out. For very numerous are their villainies. Now the blessed Apostle and those like him recognized them, for they said, 'We are not ignorant of his thoughts.' We too, through being tempted by them, ought to strengthen each other's resolve to resist them. I, who have had my share of temptations from them, speak of them to you as my children.

Wiles of the Demons, and Defenses against Them

23. "Now when they see everyone joyfully laboring and making progress--and especially monks--first they attack them by tempting them and placing stumbling blocks in their way.⁹⁷ Their stumbling blocks are filthy thoughts. But we need not fear the things they throw at us, for they⁹⁸ are brought down immediately through prayer and fasting and faith in the Lord. Now when they fall they do not go away but advance again with deceit and cunning. For when they are unable to deceive the soul by revealing themselves through filthy pleasure,⁹⁹ they rise up

again against the soul in some other way and fabricate apparitions in order to terrify, changing their shapes and taking on the appearance of women and wild beasts and reptiles and bodies of enormous size and legions of soldiers.

"Nevertheless, we need have no fear at all of them and their apparitions, for they are nothing and they go to their ruin in a hurry, especially if you defend yourself with faith and the sign of the cross. They are very daring and without shame, for if they are defeated in this way, they again make an attempt in some other way. They act discerning, as though prophesying what will come in the future; they appear as tall as the roof and as wide, so that those whom they were unable to deceive through their thoughts they think they can carry off through apparitions of this sort. But if once again they find the soul secure in faith and hope, then they bring with them their leader."

The Devil

24. And he said: "Oftentimes they appear in the following form, as when God showed¹⁰⁰ the Devil to Job when he said, 'His eyes are like the morning star. Blazing lamps come from his mouth, and flaming hearthfires. His fiery soul is smoke from an oven's burning coals. Flaming fire comes from his mouth.'¹⁰¹ When the prince of demons appears this way, causing fear (as I said earlier), that evil-doer terrifies by speaking big words, as the Lord showed Job when he said, 'He reckons iron as chaff, bronze like splintered wood, the sea a mirror and the depths of the abyss as a prisoner; he lays down the deep like a roadway.'¹⁰² Moreover, 'the Enemy said, "I will pursue, I will overtake,"¹⁰³ and "'the whole world I will seize with my hand as I would a nest, and as eggs left under them."¹⁰⁴ For if they say things like this with this sort of insolence and boasting making threats, perhaps they will <cause> some of the faithful <to fall>.

"But in these forms and guises there's no need for us to fear their illusory appearances, for they lie and do not speak the truth. As a result, the Devil says these things presumptuously: he's been pulled in by the Savior like a snake on a hook; he's taken a halter around his neck and like a runaway he's got a ring through his nose with a rope; he's been tied up <by> the Lord like a sparrow¹⁰⁵ so that <we> could mock him. He and his fellow demons, like scorpions and snakes, have been laid out so we can trample them:¹⁰⁶ we Christians need to live our lives in opposition against him. For he who says, 'I will pollute the sea and destroy the world'--look now at how he is unable to hinder our asceticism for the Lord, nor can he prevent me from speaking these words against him!

"Let us pay no attention to what he says, and let us not fear his lying apparitions. For true light does not shine in them; instead, they bear the appearance and indications of the fire being prepared for them.¹⁰⁷ With this fire that will consume them they tempt and terrify people! Therefore, when they appear now, they are destroyed; unable to harm any of the faithful, they carry with them the likeness¹⁰⁸

of the fire into which they will be cast. So we need not fear them, for everything they do comes to nothing.

More Devices of the Demons

25. "And they are ever ready to change shape. Frequently, they pretend to chant the psalms and they give readings from the scriptures. And again, when we ourselves are reading, they recite what we are reading. Often when we are sleeping they awaken us to pray, and they do this over and over, hardly allowing us to sleep at all. Oftentimes they take the form of monks and, playing the part of the devout, speak in order to deceive us through this sort of shape¹⁰⁹ and afterwards they drag us wherever they want. But we do not need to pay attention to them, even if they do awaken us to pray. For they do not do this out of fear of God as though they cared about us, but so that they can bring the simple to unbelief and cause them to be ignorant of their way of life and believe in their hearts that their asceticism is <worthless> for them. For they cause us to think that the life of a monk is wearisome as though it were an extreme burden, and they trip up those who live the monastic life in opposition to them.

26. "Therefore the prophets sent by the Lord called this sort wretched when they said, 'Woe to him who gives his neighbor poisonous drink and evil teaching.'¹¹⁰ Now these practices and thoughts of this kind subvert the way that leads to virtue. The Lord, however, silenced the demons and prevented them from speaking, even if they spoke the truth; for what they said to him was true: 'You are the Son of God.'¹¹¹ But he rebuked them so they would not <sow> their evil and mix it with the truth in order to teach us to never pay attention to the likes of these even if they seem to be speaking the truth. For we have the scriptures and freedom through the Savior, so we are not taught by the Devil, the one who did not keep his rank¹¹² but turned his thoughts to things that are evil. When he recites passages of scripture, the Lord stops him when he says, 'God has said to the sinner, "Why do you recite my statutes and take my covenant in your mouth?"'¹¹³ Now they do all these things--they talk and create uproars, they play-act and break things--in order to deceive the simple. What's more, they make obnoxious noises and laugh crazily and hiss. But if no one pays attention to them, they weep and wail like they've been defeated.

The Demons are Really Powerless

27. "And so the Lord silences the demons. And we have learned from the saints that we should do as they did. For 'like a deaf person who does not hear, like a dumb person who does not open his mouth, I was like someone who does not hear.'¹¹⁴ So let us also not listen to them so they will be strangers to us. Even if they awaken us to pray and speak to us about fasting, let us not respond to them. Let us rather devote ourselves to zealous asceticism, for they do all their works

through deceit. We ought not fear them, even if they threaten us with death, for they are powerless and are unable¹¹⁵ to do anything evil to us.

28. "But I will no longer loiter, speaking in abbreviated fashion about these things, for reminding you of these things will work to strengthen you. When the Lord <lived> among us, the Enemy was fallen and his thoughts weakened. On account of this, therefore, he is not able to do anything to us at all; like a tyrant, when he falls he does not stay down but makes threats with an abundance of words. Let each one of you think about the following and he will be able to treat the demons with contempt: If they were bound to bodies of the sort we have, they'd have the power to say, 'We cannot find the people who hide themselves, but when we do find them we will do them evil.' And we for our part would be able to hide ourselves so they could not see us or close doors on us. But since they are not like this but have the power to enter through shut doors through the air and are everywhere in the air (they and their superior the Devil)--for they are lovers of evil and are ready to do evil to everyone, as the Savior said, 'the father of evil has been a murderer from the beginning'¹¹⁶ --and yet we are alive and live our lives in opposition to them; therefore it is clear¹¹⁷ that they are unable to do anything.

"But a place does not prevent them from doing evil to us, nor are we their friends whom they might spare, nor do they love what is good so they might be reformed. No; they are extremely evil, and they care about nothing except doing evil to those who love virtue and worship God. [But because they have no power to act, they do nothing except issue threats. If they had the power, they would not delay, but immediately would perform the evil for which they have a ready inclination--especially evil directed against us. Take note, then, that we who are gathered here now speak against them, and they know that as we advance they are weakened. Indeed, if they had authority, they would not permit one of us Christians to live, for 'godliness is an abomination to a sinner.'¹¹⁸]¹¹⁹ Because they cannot do anything to us, therefore they wound themselves instead, because they are unable to do any of the things they threaten to do.

"Now then, we ought to think about this so we won't be afraid of them. If they were powerful, they would not come in such huge numbers, nor would they create apparitions, nor would they practice their deceptions by changing their shapes. No; one all by himself would be enough for him to do what he wanted to us. Furthermore, whoever has power does not murder with apparitions, nor does he need large mobs, but he immediately makes use of his power as he wishes. The demons, however, do not have the power to do anything, and are laughed at like those on the stage, changing their shapes and frightening little children by means of hordes of shapes and apparitions, which we ought to despise even more. Know, then, that they are powerless. The true angel, who was sent to the Assyrians by the Lord, had no need of hordes nor of visible apparitions nor noises. No; he used his authority quietly and destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand.¹²⁰ These

demons are unable to do anything, but they try, and they frighten by means of apparitions.

29. "If someone considers the events of Job's life and says, 'When the Devil came, why did he do all these evil things to Job? He took his possessions away from him, and killed his children and inflicted cruel wounds on him,'¹²¹ let him know that the Devil was not the one who had the power to do these things; it was God who allowed the Devil to tempt Job--for the Devil had the power to do nothing. He asked and, when he received the power, he did these things to Job. Because of this, therefore, the Devil deserves all the more to be despised--because he did not have power over one righteous man. For if he had had the power, he would not have asked for it. But when he asked, not once but twice, he showed that he was weak and unable to do anything. It is not remarkable that he had no power against Job and his cattle unless God allowed it--he had no power even over Job's pigs! But 'they begged' the Lord, as it is written in the Gospel, saying, 'Send us into the herd of swine!'¹²² If they had no power over pigs, how much less do they have over people--who have been created in the image of God!¹²³

30. "We ought, therefore, to fear God alone and hold creatures such as these in contempt and not worry about them at all. Indeed, the more they do these things, let us continue our ascetical practice against them, for a great weapon fighting against them is a just life and faith in God. They are afraid of fasting and asceticism, and all night vigils, and prayer, and tranquility, and gentleness, and the love of the poor, and mercy, and the absence of anger and, above all else, obedience to Christ. For they do all these things for this reason: so there won't be those who trample them underfoot. They know the grace that the Lord gave to the faithful to oppose them when he said, 'See, I have given you authority to tread on snakes and scorpions, and over all the power of the Enemy.'¹²⁴

False Powers of the Demons

31. "If they appear to prophesy, let no one pay attention or listen to them, for it frequently happens that they speak about brothers who are coming to us, and after a few days these brothers do arrive. Now the demons do this not because they care about those who listen to them, but so the latter might be persuaded to trust them; afterwards they come under their power and the demons destroy them. But if they speak we need to rebuke them because we have no need of them.

"What is so remarkable if they, using bodies lighter than humans possess, see those who are setting out on a journey and arrive first and report the event? Someone riding a horse will arrive ahead of someone walking and give a report! So we need not be amazed at them because of this. They do not know about what has not yet happened. But those who see these things--they're the ones who arrive first, like thieves, and make their report. They speak to each of us regarding these things, that we're gathered together and that we're saying these things against them--

--they say them before one of us leaves the group and reports it. But a small child who can run is able to do this--he'll arrive before someone who is hurriedly walking!

"What I am saying is this: If someone begins a journey from Upper Egypt or from some other place, the demons do not know that he will make a journey before he has begun it. But if they see him walking, they go ahead of him while he's walking and before he's come they say that in a few days that fellow will arrive. And it so happens that when those who are walking turn back, these demons are shown to be liars.

32. "In the same way they also talk a lot about the water of the Nile. When they see plentiful rains in Ethiopia (knowing that the river fills there), before the water enters Egypt they rush ahead and report it. But a person can run and report it if he has the ability to run as these do. And just as David's watchman, climbing to a height, saw the person coming before the others could cry out,¹²⁵ and he, running ahead, reported before the others not what had not taken place but what was going to happen, in the same way these others want to labor and inform each other in order to deceive people. But afterwards, if the providence of God commands something concerning the waters or those journeying--for it has the power--the demons are shown to be liars and those who have paid attention to them have been deceived.

33. "So the oracles of the pagans arose and so the demons deceived them at that time. But the deceit suddenly stopped because the Demiurge came who brought to an end the demons and their works. For they do not know anything on their own, but like thieves they report what others spy out for them; they are more like soothsayers than prophets. If, therefore, they discover certain things of this sort and speak the truth, let no one marvel at them. For doctors also do this when they diagnose illnesses: if they observe some disease in the particular illness of one person, they often compare it with what they've seen before. And again, when sailors and farmers with their seasoned practices observe what kind of weather is developing, they can predict that a storm is approaching. On account of this someone will <not> say that it is through the breath of God that they foretell these things but rather through experience and practice.

"The demons, therefore, are similar; they predict things like this. Let no one be amazed at them on account of this practice, nor let anyone pay any attention to them. For what advantage or profit is there for those who listen to them if the demons let them know about what's going to happen days in advance? Why such eagerness to know these things? For activity of this sort does not produce virtue, nor is it a sign of good character. For none of us will be judged--"Why doesn't he know these things?"--and no one will be considered blessed--"He knows these things." No; each person will be judged regarding these things: whether he has kept the faith¹²⁶ and diligently kept the commandments.

34. "Therefore we shouldn't be concerned about these things or practice asceticism or labor for these things in order to know what's going to happen but, on the contrary, in order to well please God. For we ought not pray to know things beforehand but so the Lord will be with us and will help us defeat the Devil. If this is a concern for us so that we need to know, let us be pure in our hearts. For I believe that when a soul is pure and is firmly established in its natural state, it is given foresight and most of the time can see far off things better than the demons since it has the Lord who reveals things to it, as Elisha the prophet saw the things regarding Gehazi and Gehazi saw the forces surrounding Elisha.¹²⁷

35. "So when they come to you at night and want to tell you about the future or they say, 'We are angels,' do not listen to them, for they are lying. And if they praise your asceticism and call you blessed, do not listen to them; instead, make the sign of the cross for yourselves and your dwellings, and pray: you will see them go away shamefacedly. For they are powerless and are completely afraid of the cross of Christ because with it he <disarmed> them and triumphed over them.¹²⁸ But if they stubbornly resist, dancing around and changing themselves into apparitions, do not be afraid, and do not pay attention to them, thinking that they might be good. It is easy to understand and discern the presence of what is evil and what is good, if God grants it, for in this way it is possible to understand them.

"A vision of the holy ones is not subject to confusion; they neither cry out, nor will anyone hear their voice.¹²⁹ For they are so peaceful and gentle that joy and the comforting of that person's soul happen quickly, for the Lord, who is our comfort, is with them; he is the light of everything, and causes them to see that which appears. But if some are afraid--since they are human--when they see the vision of those who are glorious and good, those who appear immediately take away the fear through love, as Gabriel did for Zacharias,¹³⁰ and the angel who appeared to the women at the Lord's tomb,¹³¹ and the one who said to the shepherds, 'Do not be afraid.'¹³² The fear of those people does not come from the weakness of the soul but because they have come to know the glorious ones who have come to them. Such, then, is the vision of the holy ones.

Discerning the Spirit(s)

36. "The apparitions of these evil ones are disturbing because they create disturbances through noises and loud voices and shouts--like ignorant youths and robbers do. And from these things immediately arise terror of soul, confusion and disturbance of thought, hatred, sadness, homesickness, fear of death; afterwards there is the desire for evil, contempt for virtue, hatred of asceticism. When, therefore, you see some beings who have appeared to you, do not be afraid. If the fear is immediately taken away and joy comes to you in its place, and rejoicing and peace and tranquility in what the heart counsels, and love of God, be of good courage, and pray. For the joy and stability of the soul reveal the holiness of the one who

has come to you. Thus Abraham saw the Lord and rejoiced,¹³³ and John, when the voice of the holy virgin Mary reached him, leaped for joy and danced.¹³⁴ But when they appear to you, if a great disturbance reaches the soul, and threat of death, and the things that come after these, [know that the communication is from the wicked.]¹³⁵

37. "Moreover, let this other matter be clear to you: When the soul of someone remains fearful, know that enemies are present. For the demons are unable to remove weakness from things of this sort¹³⁶ as the great archangel¹³⁷ did for Mary and Zacharias, and the one who appeared to the women at the tomb. On the contrary, if they see some people who are frightened, they make the apparitions stronger and more numerous. Afterwards, the demons behave arrogantly and laugh at them, saying, 'Prostrate yourselves and worship us.'¹³⁸ For they deceived the Greeks this way so the Greeks thought they were false gods.¹³⁹ But our Lord did not allow the Devil to deceive us, for whenever the Devil created apparitions the Lord rebuked him, saying, 'Away with you, Satan! For it is written, "The Lord your God is the one whom you shall worship, and him only shall you serve."¹⁴⁰ Let us, then, all the more despise the deceitful one. What the Lord said, he has done for us; as a result, when the demons hear from you that we are talking like this, they are powerless on account of the Lord who rebuked them.

38. "It is not right for someone to boast that he casts out demons, nor to be arrogant about doing healings, nor should he marvel at the one who casts out demons and despise the one who does not. He ought instead to consider the ascetical practice of each and emulate them, for the doing of signs and wonders¹⁴¹ is not our doing, but the Lord's. He said to his disciples, 'Do not rejoice that the demons submit to you but rejoice instead that your names are written in heaven.'¹⁴² [The fact that the names are written in heaven]¹⁴³ is testimony to the virtue of our way of life. If we cast out demons, that is the Savior's gift. Therefore, to those who were taking pride not in virtue but in being proud about signs and were saying, 'Did we not cast out demons in your name and do great and powerful deeds in your name?' he answered them by saying, 'Amen, I say to you, "I do not know you."¹⁴⁴ For the Lord does not know the way of the ungodly.¹⁴⁵ We ought, therefore, to pray all the time without ceasing,¹⁴⁶ as I said before, to receive the gift of discerning the Spirit so that we might not believe every spirit.¹⁴⁷

Antony Speaks about His Own Experience with Demons

39. "Now I wanted to remain silent and not say anything about myself, but so you will think that I'm talking about these things sincerely and believe that I'm speaking truly and from experience--the Lord who listens to the purity of my conscience knows that I am not going to speak for my own benefit but for the sake of your love and spiritual progress--I'll now talk about what I have seen the demons do to me.

"Often they've blessed me, and they've cursed me with the Lord's name. Often they've spoken to me about the Nile's waters, but I said to them, 'What concern is that of yours?' They surrounded me like soldiers. Sometimes they would fill my dwelling with horses and reptiles, but I would chant the psalms, saying, 'These with chariots and these others with horses, but we will be great through the name of the Lord our God,'¹⁴⁸ and through this prayer they were defeated by the Lord.

"It happened again one time that they came at dark, in an apparition of light, and said, 'We have come to bring you light, Antony,' but I shut my eyes and prayed, and immediately the light was extinguished. On another occasion they came chanting and quoting from scripture, but I, as one deaf, did not listen.¹⁴⁹ One day they shook my monastic cell, but I was unshaken in my thoughts. Again they came, clapping their hands and whistling and dancing about, but I prayed and chanted the psalms and they began to weep and wail.

40. "Once a tall demon appeared in an apparition and had the audacity to say, 'I am the Power of the Most High and I am Providence. What do you want me to give you?' But I blew upon him in the Lord's name and began to beat him; I thought I hit him, and then this form and his demons disappeared because of the name of Christ. And again one day while I was fasting, the deceitful one came to me in the form of a monk who, in an elaborate fantasy, had loaves of bread with him; he acted solicitous and unashamedly said to me, 'Get up and eat, and stop all these sufferings. You are only human and you will grow tired and get sick.' But I recognized his deceitfulness; I stood and I prayed, and he couldn't stand it that I was standing and praying. He stopped and, disappearing like smoke, fled through the door.

"How many times he showed gold to me in the desert so that when I saw it I would gladly touch it! But I chanted psalms, and he dissolved away. Many times they beat and wounded me, but I would say, 'Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ,'¹⁵⁰ so they beat each other. It wasn't me who humiliated them or forced them to stop; it was the Lord, who says, 'I saw Satan fall from heaven like lightning.'¹⁵¹ Now I, my children, remembered what the Apostle said--I have applied this to myself¹⁵² --so you might learn not to lose heart while doing your ascetical practice and not fear the apparitions of the Devil.

41. "Since I have become like those who are foolish¹⁵³ when I speak about these matters, receive this also for yourselves to inspire fearlessness, and believe that I am not lying. One day he¹⁵⁴ knocked at the door of my monastic cell and when I went out I saw someone black and very tall. I asked him, 'Who are you?' He said, 'I am Satan.' I said to him, 'And what are you doing here?' He said to me, 'Why do the monks and the Christians find fault with me? And why do they curse me all the time?' I said to him, 'Why do *you* harass them?' He said, 'It's not me; they're the ones upsetting themselves, for I am powerless. And haven't you read

that 'the swords of the enemy have been completely done away with; you have sacked their cities'?'¹⁵⁵ From now on I claim no place as my own, neither weapon nor city. Christians are everywhere! The desert's full of monks! Let them take care of themselves and stop cursing me for no reason! After the Devil said these things, I marvelled greatly at the grace of the Lord. I said to him, 'You're a liar and you've never spoken the truth. But just now you unwittingly told the truth when you spoke: when Christ came he rendered you powerless and he threw you down and stripped you naked.' Now when he heard the name of Christ, he couldn't stand it and immediately disappeared.

Antony Concludes His Speech by Exhorting His Listeners

42. "If the Devil himself has confessed that he is powerless, then we for our part ought to despise him and his demons. Now the Enemy, along with his dogs, possesses treacheries of this sort, but we, having recognized their weakness, are able to hold them in contempt. Let our thoughts, then, not fall prostrate before him, [nor contemplate horrors in the soul, nor invent fears for ourselves, saying, 'How I hope that when a demon comes, he will not overthrow me--or pick me up and throw me down--or suddenly set himself next to me and cast me into confusion!']¹⁵⁶ And let us not think things like this at all. Let us be even more courageous and let us rejoice always because we have been saved, and let us believe in our hearts that the Lord is with us, he who defeated them and held them in contempt.

"Let us always believe this and consider in our hearts that when the Lord is with us the enemies are powerless to do anything evil to us. For when they come and seem to stand before us, they mirror the way we are and pattern their thoughts after our own; using such methods, they work their apparitions against us. If they find us frightened and upset, like thieves they find the place unwatched and rise up against us and reveal to us and do whatever thoughts we are thinking. If they find us fearful and weak, they terrify us even more with apparitions and threats; thereafter they punish the soul with these things.

"If, however, they find us rejoicing in the Lord, thinking thoughts about the good things to come, considering the Lord and his works and pondering them as we say, 'Everything is in the hands of the Lord,' and 'The demons will be powerless against Christians,' and 'They have no authority over anyone'--if they see that the soul is held secure through deliberations of this sort, immediately they are put to shame and turned away. In the same way when the Enemy found Job secure, he withdrew from him, but when he found Judas stripped defenseless of these things, he took him prisoner.¹⁵⁷ If we wish to hold the Enemy in contempt, let us keep our thoughts fixed always on the Lord and his works, and let our souls rejoice always in hope,¹⁵⁸ and we will see the mocking works of the demons like smoke flee before us, unable to pursue us.¹⁵⁹ For they are very weak, as I said before, always

watching for the fire prepared for them.¹⁶⁰

43. "For we have this sign of fearlessness before them: whenever some apparition appears, do not collapse weakly before it, but whoever it is, let him bravely ask right off, 'Who are you?' or 'Where do you come from?' Now if it is a holy revelation that has revealed itself to you, it will give you courage and turn your fear into joy. But if it is an apparition from the Devil, it will immediately become weak when it sees the purity of your heart. For this is a sign of calmness when a person asks 'Who are you?' or 'Where did you come from?' Thus the son of Nun understood when he asked, and also the Enemy could not hide from Daniel when the latter searched him out."¹⁶¹

The Life of the Monks Together

44. While Antony was talking to them about these things they greatly rejoiced; some of them turned their thoughts all the more to virtue while others who were faint-hearted were strengthened, and everyone looked with contempt on the demons, marvelling at the grace that God gave to Antony. The mountains were full of holy monks as though filled with the tents of God: they were chanting psalms, fasting, and praying, working and giving to the poor; they had love for each other, and there was harmony among them. And they were there in that place truly as though it were a land unlike any other. No one committed violence there, nor were there the demands of the tax collector.¹⁶² Instead, there was a multitude of ascetics there in that place; they were of one mind,¹⁶³ given to virtue, so that someone who saw them would say, "Good are your dwellings, Jacob, and your tents, Israel; like shady groves and like gardens beside the rivers, and like the fruit beside the waters."¹⁶⁴

Antony's Way of Life

45. Antony, as was his custom, would withdraw by himself to his monastic cell, continuing each day his ascetical practice: each day he would sigh, reflecting in his heart on the heavenly dwellings--such love he had for them!--contemplating daily the way of life of those who follow God. For, indeed, when he was about to eat or sleep, he would feel ashamed, thinking in his heart about the watching spirit of his soul. Moreover, often while he was eating with the brothers, he would think about spiritual food and ask to be excused from eating; he would go and leave them, saying that it would be shameful if some of them saw him eating.

He would, of course, eat by himself to meet the body's necessities and, also, he would often eat with the brothers. And he would say that we ought to devote all our time to the soul rather than to the body, but give to the body a little bread out of necessity; the rest of the time, however, we ought to devote to the soul and seek what is good for it so it will not be dragged down by bodily pleasures but will cause the body to serve it.¹⁶⁵ For this is what the Savior said: "Do not worry about

your life,¹⁶⁶ what you will eat, or about your body, what you will wear. For all these things the nations¹⁶⁷ strive after. Instead, seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."¹⁶⁸

Antony Goes to Alexandria to Bear Witness with the Martyrs

46. Afterwards, the persecution of Maximin came upon the Church,¹⁶⁹ and when the holy martyrs were led into Alexandria, Antony left his monastic cell and followed them, saying, "Let us also go and face the contest with the holy ones if we are called, or witness those who fight." For he wanted to be a martyr,¹⁷⁰ and remained to serve¹⁷¹ the confessors in the mines and prisons. He demonstrated great determination for those who had been called before the law courts to face the contest and trained them to be steadfast. He would kiss and embrace those who were going to be martyrs, walking with them until they were perfected. When the judge saw his fearlessness and his determination in this matter, he ordered that none of the monks were to appear in the court and were not to remain in the city at all.

Now all the others acted like they were going into hiding that day, but Antony showed no concern at all for himself. As a result, he thoroughly washed his clothes and the next day stood in front of everyone; going up to a prominent place, he showed himself even more openly to the magistrate. Everyone marvelled at what he was doing. The magistrate saw him and after he rose from the judgment seat and passed by, Antony stood calmly before him, demonstrating the determination of the Christians. For he wanted to be a martyr also, as I said earlier, and he was sad because of the part he played. But it was the Lord who was keeping him safe for our benefit and the benefit of others so that through the asceticism that he had learned from the scriptures he might become a teacher to a multitude. For when they saw his character and the way he was advancing in ascetical practice, a multitude were eager to emulate his way of life. Once again, therefore, he served the confessors in his usual way and acted as though he were bound with them,¹⁷² suffering and serving.

Antony Bears Witness in the Desert

47. When the persecution ended, after the blessed Bishop Peter had borne witness as a martyr,¹⁷³ Antony left <and withdrew to> his monastic cell and daily <bore witness> there according to his usual custom, for he undertook great and numerous and very difficult ascetic practices: he would fast all the time, the clothing that he wore consisted of haircloth on the inside while the outside was made of animal skin, and until the day he died he did not bathe in water and did not wash his feet at all unless it was necessary. No one saw him naked except on the day he died.

48. Now he withdrew and was determined not to go out and not to allow anyone to come see him, but a certain Martinus, a military officer, bothered Antony

because he had a daughter who was bothered by an evil demon. When he continually knocked on the door and asked him to come out and pray to God on behalf of his daughter, Antony did not listen to him or open the door to him but looked at him from up above and said to him, "Man, why do you call out to me since I am just a man like you? If you believe in Christ, whom I serve, go, pray to God according to your faith, and she will be healed." And immediately the man believed; he called upon the name of Christ, and she was cleansed of the demon. The Lord did many wonders through him, for a multitude of those who were afflicted, when he did not open the door to them, would sleep outside his monastic cell, completely believing with all their hearts, and they found relief.

Antony Withdraws to the Mountain

49. When he saw the multitude disturbing him, that they were not going to allow him to withdraw as he wished, he was afraid that, because of these wonders that the Lord was doing through him, [he might become haughty] and someone might think he was greater than he was. He deliberated within and decided to go to Upper Egypt, to those who did not know him. He took a little bread from the brothers and sat beside the riverbank; he watched out for a boat that might be passing by that he could board and so go there. While he was thinking these things, a voice came to him from heaven, saying, "Antony, where are you going from here?" Now he was not bothered at all; it was customary for him to be summoned like this so he answered, "Since the crowds do not allow me to withdraw or find peaceful solitude, I want to go to Upper Egypt because they badly disturb me and ask for things beyond my ability."

The voice said to him, "Even if you go to the Thebaid, even if you go to 'the Pastures' as you are planning, you will encounter great difficulties, twice as many. If you truly desire peaceful solitude, go to the further desert." Antony said, "And who will show me the way there?" and immediately he was shown some Saracens who were going that way. Antony approached them and asked to go to the desert with them and they, as though the providence of God were commanding them, eagerly agreed, and he traveled with them three days and three nights and came upon a great high mountain with an abundant supply of water beneath it, very pure and sweet and cold; there was a plot of land beyond his place with small date palms that were untended.

50. Now Antony, as one moved by God, fell in love with the place, for this was the place indicated by the one who had spoken with him beside the riverbank. He first accepted some small loaves of bread from those with whom he had traveled and he remained on the mountain by himself, like someone who recognizes his home. When the Saracens saw Antony's zeal, they would often go that way and would joyfully give small loaves of bread to him. He also took a little

comfort from the palm trees.

Later, when the brothers found out about his home, they were like little children who think of their father and they cared for him and sent him everything he needed. But when Antony saw them, that through their concern for bread some who came to him on this arduous journey were being troubled and were enduring great afflictions, he was concerned on account of the brothers who came to him. He deliberated within and asked the brethren who came to him to bring him a <tool for planting seed>, an ax, and a little grain. Once he had these things, he inspected the land around the mountain and found a small area suitable for planting. He husbanded the land well and sowed it and watered it so it would prosper and by doing this each year he had a little bread, rejoicing that he would be bothering no one, and he kept watch over himself all the more so he would not bother anyone about anything.

But later, when once again he saw some people coming to see him, he planted a few greens and herbs so that those who visited him would find a little relief from their difficult journey. At first, however, the wild beasts in the desert would often come around on account of the water and they would destroy what he planted. But he, through the grace of God who was with him, captured one of the beasts there and said to all of them, "Why do you destroy my husbandry when I do you no harm? In the name of Christ, do not return here again." The beasts, therefore, from that day on, as though they were afraid because of what he had commanded them, did not return to the mountain.

On the Mountain Antony Contends with the Demons

51. So Antony remained on the mountain by himself, devoting himself to asceticism and prayer. The brothers who came to see him asked him if they could serve him through the months; they brought him olives and beans and oil, for he was an old man when he lived there. How many afflictions he endured--as it is written, "The struggle for us is not against blood and flesh," but against evil demons--we know, furthermore, from those who went to see him. For they heard there tumults and thronging voices and the sounds of weapons; at night they saw the mountain filled with fiery sparks, and they saw him fighting against some things as though he could see them and was praying against them. Those who came to see him he would strengthen all the more. It was truly worthy of admiration that he was all alone in the desert and yet was not afraid of the demons, nor of the numerous beasts there. Truly, because he trusted in the Lord, he was like Mount Sion; as a result, the demons fled from him and the wild beasts, as it is written, made peace with him.

52. Now the Devil watched Antony--as David said when he sang: "he gnashed his teeth against me" --but Antony, comforted by the Savior, was kept safe from the Enemy's cunning and his many wiles. When Antony was keeping vigil

during the night, the Enemy sent against him wild beasts, and all the hyenas in that desert left their dens and surrounded and encircled him. Each one would snarl at him, threatening to bite him, but he knew the Enemy's skills. He said to all of them, "If you have received authority over me, I am ready for you to devour me; if demons were the ones who sent you, do not stay here, go away, for I am the servant of Christ." When Antony said these words to them they fled, because his words chased them like a whip.

53. Again a few days later he was working (for he would labor diligently); someone stood at the door and pulled the strand that he was working (for he was weaving baskets that he gave to those who came to visit him in exchange for the things they brought to him). When he got up, he saw a beast with a human shape down to its thighs; its legs and feet were like those of a donkey. But Antony, when he saw him, crossed himself and said to him, "I am the servant of Christ. If you have been sent to me, look, here I am!" And the beast, along with the demons with him, fled so quickly that in his haste to flee he fell down and died. The death of the beast was the downfall of the evil beasts and demons; they had tried everything in order to drive Antony from the desert, but were unable.

Antony Visits the Brothers and Works a Miracle

54. Some monks asked him one day to come down to them and pay them and their dwellings a lengthy visit, and so he traveled with those who had been sent to him. They had a camel to carry bread for them and water, for there is no water in that desert except on the mountain where Antony's monastic cell was, and there they drew water for the journey. When they ran out of water on the road, a terrible scorching heat threatened to kill all of them. Despite going around everywhere there, they found no water to drink and were unable to walk at all but instead fell on the ground; they let the camel go its own way because they had given up completely. But when the old man saw them in such danger, he sighed deeply and, moving a short distance from them, he knelt on the ground and prayed, and immediately the Lord caused water to come out of the place where he was praying. And so they all drank, and their senses returned to them and they filled their