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# PI MONAKHOS THE MONK

## ΠΙΜΟΝΑΧΟΣ

A monthly newsletter with monastic issues for today's youth

Vol: 2 Issue: 1

Touba 1724 / Jan 2008

### Special Edition: Feast of St Anthony

22 Touba—31 January

## St Anthony & his love to God.



**Inside St Anthony's**

When the love of God took a strong hold of St. Anthony's heart; it removed all the fear from his heart completely, even from God he did not fear. He was able to say to his disciples "I do not fear God." They were amazed and said to him: "These words are hard to comprehend." He answered "Because I love Him and 'love casts out fear' (John 4:18)."

For the sake of this love, St. Anthony left every thing, because the Lord was most treasured and dearer than anything else or any person. As the Lord's love entered the heart of St. Anthony, he did not need any other love, strength or comfort. The love of God is the motive to solitude and the life of prayer. St Anthony loved God and because of his love to Him, he lived in solitude and was unable to be separated from the LORD or divert his intention to anyone else. A spiritual elder said about this; 'the love of God is my exile from the world' so out of this love he found spiritual satisfaction in talking with Him. As David the prophet said; 'Your name is loved LORD, for I mention it all day long' as it is said in the tasbeha 'Your name is sweet and blessed in the mouth of Your saints'.

The positive deep spiritual meaning of the monastic life, is the ultimate union with God, not its negative meaning of separation from the world. As sweetly said by David the prophet, "but it is good for me to draw near to God" (Psalm 73:28). And how does a man draw nearer to God, if his feelings and thoughts are busy with the world and what is in it? As the love of God leads man to the life of prayer and solitude, it also leads to an ascetic life. Before the sweetness of God, everything else loses its value and becomes useless. St. Paul the Apostle said, "I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them to be dung, so that I may win Christ" (Philippians 3:7). Here we find ascetic life is not forced on man but chosen as he leaves the world and what is in it, for the love of God. It is a deep belief within a man that the wealth of the world is nothing.



This comes about due to the deep love for God. Therefore, a man can see that the joy of the world does not fill his need, as his heart is open to greater, deeper and finer love; that is the love of God. On the other hand if the love of the world took control of a man's heart it casts out the love of God. The Apostle said that the love of the world is enmity with God.

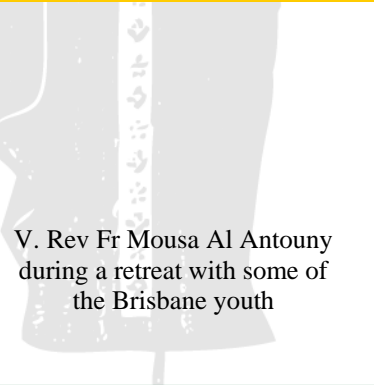
We ask ourselves; how did St. Anthony live in a deserted cave? How did he persevere being far away from any human comfort and how did he feel such a need for solitude? The answer to the question is that he was filled by the love of God and therefore did not need anything. Solitude in regards to St. Anthony did not mean that he was on his own. But it was a life with the Lord and His angels, away from the social life.

The life with the Lord helped the love to grow in St. Anthony's heart so that when he met people he welcomed them with love and also his dealing with his disciples was full of love and the spirit of humility; this was the fruit of the love that was in him. So St. Anthony's life with the Lord was not a matter of hiding from the world but a life full of love towards Him.

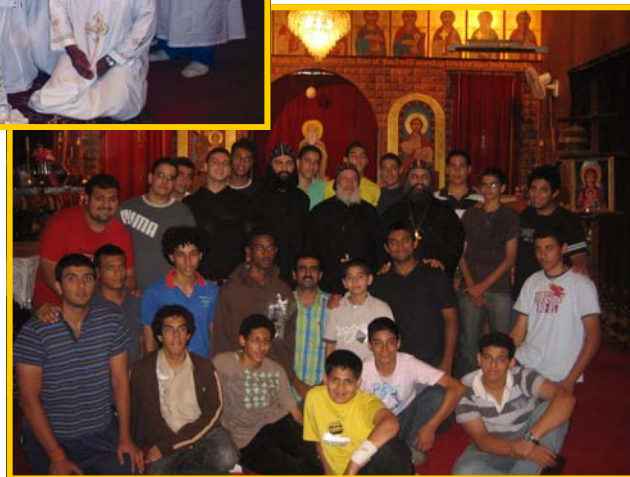
**By: H.H. Pope Shenouda III**



H.G. Bishop Sarabamon (Om Dorman) and the monks after a Liturgy with some of the youth.



V. Rev Fr Mousa Al Antouny during a retreat with some of the Brisbane youth





## Spiritual Struggle in the life of St Anthony

**Why do we struggle?** There are many reasons why we need to struggle, but it is beyond the scope of this little article to discuss them. Instead we will focus on one of the reasons why we must struggle. Let us look to St Athanasius the Great's view in the "*Life of St Anthony*" for this reason "*the devil, who hates and envies what is good, could not endure to see such a resolution in a youth, but endeavoured to carry out against him what he wanted to do against others.*"

Thus it appears that it is quite a simple concept, according to St Athanasius, as to why we must struggle. It is merely because the devil is jealous of the good that humans can do. More than that, he is jealous of the effect a holy youth can have on the heart of God. For the devil to see a youth with resolution to be pure and honest in the eyes of God, would be to tear him apart in envy, and thus he will use all the powers at his disposal and stop at no length till the time of our deaths, to stop us from being pleasing to God. The devil knows that a youth that is struggling is building up layer upon layer, almost a fortress, of defence against him, and that each time he wins a battle against sin that this wall becomes all the more impenetrable. And over a lifetime the devil knows this is one more soul he cannot win. But unfortunately each time we succumb that wall withers that little bit.

**So what techniques does this enemy use against us?** In his book on the "*Life of St Anthony*", St Athanasius notes a number of techniques we may not have noticed prior (all of which the Holy St Anthony was aware of and fought off with a glorious victory).

The first technique used against Anthony was "*whispering to him the remembrance of*" his former life, and all those desires and pleasures that Anthony once had, and could easily have. He remembered all those things that are not even evil to possess, like a good nights sleep, a family, or a healthy meal. The devil need not make us stumble on those things that are obvious to us as sin, but simply he exploits our pleasures, and turns them, once we love them and choose them over God, into sin.

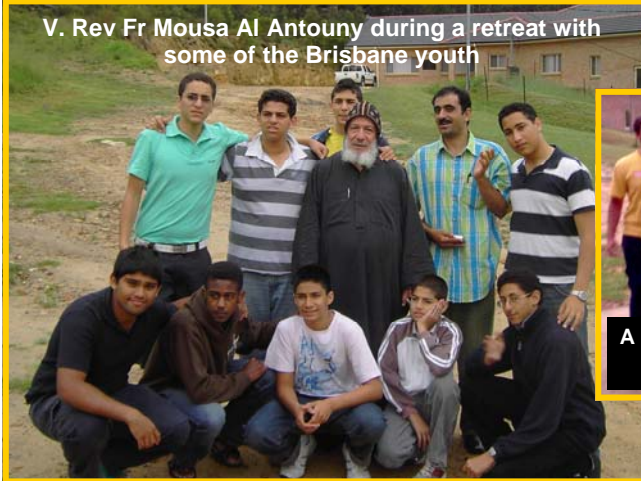
If this doesn't work then the devil may bring to our attention the "*length of the time*" ahead of us in our struggle. Many times we fall simply because we feel that we can overcome sin only this time, but not for life, not for the time it takes to be saved. Remember that every time you defeat sin, it becomes easier and easier in the subsequent battles. We must not be deceived by this thought, and simply live to fight sin and the wiles of the devil on a day to day, or even minute to minute basis.

If this still does not overcome us, as of course it did not with St Anthony in his "determination", the devil will use one last method. We will be attacked physically. These physical temptations again, may not be recognizably attributable to the devil. But we must be cautious always to discern the works of the evil one. Let us see how St Anthony deals with an apparent simple dish of food on the road as he walks on his spiritual path:





V. Rev Fr Mousa Al Antouny during a retreat with some of the Brisbane youth



A Group of HSC Students Finding their results at the Monastery



Fr Mathew and a Group of youth in a COYA trip to the monastery



The youth of the retreat house during a bushwalk



The Monks of the monastery during vesper prayers



## The Word in the Desert



Word and flesh are very different. Yet the great Christian claim is that, Word does indeed take flesh, that God's Word took flesh in the person of Jesus. Still, when we hear about the Word becoming flesh and dwelling among us (Jn 1:14,), we do not think about words made flesh and dwelling in the desert, words that have the power in the wilderness to heal and give life, that subdue and defeat the Devil. But the Life of Antony repeats, in its own way, the gospel claim: it really is the story of the Word in the desert. The Life of Antony is obviously about Antony. But what it really is the story of Christ, the Word, the story of words and their power. The power of one remarkable man who incorporated the Word so fully in his life that he gave it new flesh, new voice and language.

Central to Antony's calling and way of life is the word: the incarnate Word made flesh in Christ and the word of Scripture. Athanasius speaks of how Antony listened attentively to the readings from Scripture. The "Life of Antony" a relatively brief work of ninety-four paragraphs, has some four hundred references or allusions to the Bible. For Athanasius, Antony is a holy man like the biblical worthies of old; therefore, he paints virtually every aspect of Antony's life and thought in biblical colours. Renaissance painters took biblical figures and placed them in Italian landscapes and contemporary European clothing; Athanasius takes a contemporary figure "Antony" and places him in an Egyptian setting "the desert", but clothes him in biblical dress. With his mode of presentation, Athanasius is faithful to, and accurately represents, the biblical spirituality of early monasticism. In his words and life, Antony, like many other abbas and ammas of the Egyptian desert is a living text.

This is because the father's words were seen as being an extension of the Scriptures in virtue of the fact that by the purity of his life the father was a living embodiment of the Scriptures. Indeed, he was a living text. A father was a father precisely because he was a living text, because by his way of life he expressed the meaning of Scripture.

In addition to the Bible, Athanasius was undoubtedly influenced also by earlier Greco-roman biographies, and he begins the Life of Antony conventionally enough, with Antony's birth and parentage; but behind this straightforward presentation already lie several biblical allusions, which Athanasius undoubtedly intended his audience to hear and mark. Like Jesus, Antony "grew and advanced in age" (Lk 2:40, 2:52); like Jacob, young Antony wanted "to live at home" (Gn25:27), he followed his parents instructions (1 Tm4:13) and, like the Mother of God, kept what was profitable in her heart (Lk 2:51). Antony, as Athanasius quickly makes clear, is not just the boy next door; he embodies the virtues of Jesus, Jacob, and Mary.



Then occurs one of the signal events in all of Christian history: Antony's call. Left in charge of his home and young sister by his parents' deaths, Antony one day is walking to church: "going to church and thinking to himself, he was reflecting on ... how the apostles gave up everything and followed the Saviour" (Mt 4:20, 19:27). This thought leads Antony to think of the Christian community depicted in Acts, where the first followers of Christ sold their possessions and gave the money to the Apostles for distribution to those in need (Acts 4:34-5). This in turn leads Antony to think about the hope "laid up for them in heaven" (2 Col 1:5, Eph 1:18). Pondering these things in his heart, he goes into church and hears the Lord saying to the rich man, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell all your possessions and give to the poor, and come follow me, and you will have treasure in heaven" ( Mt 19:21). Antony does as the Gospel asks: he sells all his possessions, keeping back a few things for his sister. But when he enters the church once again, he hears the Lord saying in the Gospel, "Do not be concerned about tomorrow" (Mt 6:34), so he sells his remaining possessions, entrusts his sister to some female ascetics, and devotes himself to ascetic discipline.

Antony's call is biblical, rooted as deeply in the Gospel as roots will grow. Such biblical renunciation and embracing certainly had a wider social context than the Life presents. Yet Antony's central motivation in the passage is simple: he obeys, very literally, the words of Christ. Do these two paragraphs about Antony's call accurately portray events in his life, or are they Athanasius' idealized, biblical, presentation? Are the two events separable? The depiction of Antony's call is true to the early monastic understanding of biblical reality. Can anyone doubt that the Gospel called men and women to the desert, to a life of prayer and service? In the Apophthegmata Antony himself affirms the centrality of Scripture.

Hearing the Gospel, really hearing it, prompts Antony to act and his actions are portrayed in biblical terms. One passage serves as a microcosm of the Life, in which almost all of Antony's activities take place within a great circle of light cast by the Bible: Thus occupying himself at first in that place, he resolved not to think about things concerning his parents, nor would he remember his relatives [see Mt 10:37].

All his desire and all his energies he directed toward the great effort of asceticism. Therefore he worked with his hands, having heard "Let the lazy person not eat" [2 Thes 3:10. He would spend part of what he earned on bread and part of it he would give to those who were begging. He prayed all the time, having learned that it is necessary to pray by yourself without ceasing [see Mt 6:6, 1 Thes 5:7]. Indeed, he paid such close attention to the reading of Scripture that nothing in the Scriptures was wasted [see 1 Sm 3:19], 2 Kings 10:10]; he remembered everything [see Lk 8:15], with the result that for him memory took the place of books.

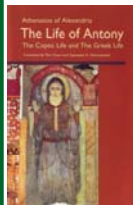
**By: Tim Vivian  
An Episcopal Priest**

## Questions & Answers

### I long for monastic life, but I don't know the appropriate time to enter the monastery?

Pray and wait with patience, looking to see whether a door will open. The Lord will arrange things in such a way as you cannot guess. Put yourself completely in His hands. The monastery is not the only place for those who do not want to be bound by family ties. In the beginning there were no monasteries at all. Those who made up their minds to serve the Lord without being bound by everyday cares set up solitary cells for themselves within their homes and lived there, estranged from everything, fasting, praying and reading the Divine Scriptures. Then, after some time had passed and it became inconvenient to live in homes, some began leaving the cities and lived in natural caves. After that, monasteries were set up so people could live in a community and maintain themselves and carry on the activity of salvation in deliberate deeds through mutual efforts.

Follow the first way of life, that is, living at home. Have your own room; have it like a monastic cell, and conduct life there as if you were in a monastery. Let your father and mother be in place of the Father Superior for you; your family in place of the monks of the monastery; and you, a devoted novice for all. You are hastening to a monastery as if to freedom and to Paradise. Indeed there is complete freedom for the spirit in a monastery, but not for the body or external activities. With regard to this, there is the absolute spiritual prohibition, which is immutable law, against having one's own will. You will indeed find Paradise there, but not always as if you are strolling down a flowery path. It may truly be found there, but it is obstructed by thorns and barbs through which you must go to reach it. No one achieves it without getting bruises and scratches. Keep these things in mind, and you will attain your hoped freedom and Paradise in the monastery.



Tran: Tim Vivian, "***The Life of Antony, The Coptic Life and the Greek Life***", Cistercian Publications

Instrumental in the conversion of many, including Augustine, *The Life of Antony* provided the model for subsequent saints' life and constituted the most important document of early monasticism. Here in one volume are translations of the Greek text written by Athanasius and of the Coptic text, translated back into the language Antony himself spoke. By having both together, readers become sensitive to some of the Hellenized shadings provided by the Archbishop of Alexandria.



Trans: Derwas J. Chitty, "***The letters of Saint Antony the Great***", SLG Press.

These are seven letters addressed by St Antony to his disciples. They centre our attention on those things which are essential in the spiritual life. As the reader ponders the text, the dominant themes of the witness of the Holy Spirit, the need to attain self knowledge and the gift of repentance to enter into the fullness of the church's life, reveal themselves.