

Antony the Great, d. 356

observed 17 January



Saint Antony was the first Christian ascetic to become widely known and emulated. There had been many ascetics before him, trying to follow Jesus with their whole lives. Antony was the one who took asceticism into the wilderness. It was the biography of Antony written by the wonderful Bishop Athanasius of Alexandria that spread Antony's fame, particularly in the Western Church, and was instrumental in encouraging the widespread development of monasticism as an honored Christian lifestyle. Antony lived from the middle of the second to the middle of the third century, a critical time of Christian development. His psychological and physical battles with demonic spirits are one of the most famous aspects of his desert life. People came to him there to seek his prayers and counsel and to minister to his physical needs. Although he went into the desert seeking solitude with God, Antony eventually found himself surrounded by followers who were inspired by his example, so that what began as the life of an anchorite (an individual walled in alone) became a sort of 'proto-monastery' where the daily routine of Antony provided the rule of life for the others.

Antony and Athanasius are prominent examples of the flourishing of Christianity in Egypt in the early centuries of the Church. Coptic Christians are justifiably proud of these forbears and their unbroken faithfulness to this early rooting of the faith. It is fitting that the rest of us pray for them faithfully in this time of renewed persecution.

Lessons I Kings 17:1-9; Psalm 91:9-16; I Peter 5:6-10; Mark 10:17-21

Collect O God, who by your Holy Spirit enabled your servant Antony to withstand the temptations of the world, the flesh, and the devil: Give us grace, with pure hearts and minds, to follow you, the only God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.