

# Wilderness Prayers with St Paul, 1<sup>st</sup> Hermit

*Contemplative Prayer Service*

Leader: Jamee	Service Prep: Contemplative Team	LA: Fleur
Proofer: Chris	Formatter: Kristine	Reader:

## *Introduction to Paul of Thebes*

Born in approximately 230, in a very rich family, Paul received a good education, but was orphaned at 15. As a Christian, he went into hiding during the Decian persecution, when he became aware of his brother-in-law's plan to betray him to the authorities.

The young man retreated to a remote desert location, where he discovered a large abandoned cave. He found that he could survive on water from a spring. A raven brought him half a loaf of bread daily. Saint Paul dwelt there for ninety-one years, praying incessantly to God both day and night. He sustained himself on dates and bread, which a raven brought him, and he clothed himself with palm leaves.

Forced into the wilderness by circumstance, Paul found he loved the life of prayer and simplicity that it made possible. Thus, he never returned to the outside world, even though he lived well into the era of the Church's legalisation and acceptance by the Roman Empire.

## So how do we know about him at all?

The desert Father Saint Anthony the Great, who also lived as an ascetic in the desert, was tempted to vain-glory, thinking he was the first to dwell in the desert, had a revelation from God concerning Saint Paul, telling him “Anthony, there is a servant of God more excellent than you, and you should go and see him.” Saint Anthony thought that there was no other desert dweller such as he. In obedience to a vision, he set forth to find his predecessor.

Saint Anthony went into the desert and came to Saint Paul’s cave. Falling to the ground before the entrance to the cave, he asked to be admitted. The two hermits introduced themselves, and embraced one another and Saint Anthony revealed how he had been led there by God. Saint Paul disclosed to Saint Anthony that for sixty years a raven had brought him half a loaf of bread each day. On this day the Lord sent a double portion in honour of Saint Anthony’s visit.

The next morning, Saint Paul spoke to Anthony of his approaching death, and instructed him to bury him. He also asked Saint Anthony to return to his monastery and bring back the cloak he had received from Saint Athanasius. He did not really need a garment, but wished to depart from his body while Saint Anthony was absent. As he was returning with the cloak, Saint Anthony beheld the soul of Saint Paul surrounded by angels, prophets, and apostles, shining like the sun and ascending to God. He entered the cave and found Abba Paul on his knees with his arms outstretched. Saint Anthony mourned for him, and wrapped him in the cloak. He wondered how he would bury the body, for he had not remembered to bring a shovel. Two lions came running from the wilderness and dug a grave with their claws. Saint Anthony buried the holy Elder, and having given him Athanasius’ cloak, St. Anthony took back to his hermitage the garment which St. Paul of Thebes had woven for himself from palm leaves. Saint Anthony kept this garb as a precious inheritance, and wore it only twice a year, on Pascha and Pentecost.

Saint Paul of Thebes died in the year 341, when he was 113 years old. He did not establish a single monastery, but soon after his end there were many imitators of his life, and they filled the desert with monasteries. Saint Paul is honoured as the first desert-dweller and hermit.

## Gathering Prayer

All:

Gracious God, you led Saint Paul of Thebes into the desert that he might put aside all worldly cares and focus on a life of holiness.

Through the example of his life of solitude, prayer and penance, grant that we, who are striving to develop in ourselves the spirit of prayer and service, may come ever closer to you in love.

We make our prayer through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

Amen.

Song

*Lift Thine Eyes*

<https://youtu.be/THjvWy1rTw>

## Scripture

A reading from Isaiah Chapter 40: verses 3-5

<sup>3</sup> A voice cries out:

'In the wilderness prepare the way of the LORD,  
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

<sup>4</sup> Every valley shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill  
be made low; the uneven ground shall become level,  
and the rough places a plain.

<sup>5</sup> Then the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all people  
shall see it together, for the mouth of the LORD has spoken.'

*Hear what the Spirit is saying to the Church. Thanks Be to God.*

Song

*A Voice Cries Out*

[https://youtu.be/fBG\\_uNYVzRQ](https://youtu.be/fBG_uNYVzRQ)

## *Lectio Divina*

We begin our prayer: In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**

Almighty ever-living God, by whose gift we venerate in one celebration the merits of all the Saints, bestow on us, we pray, through the prayers of so many intercessors, an abundance of the reconciliation with you for which we earnestly long. Through our Lord Jesus Christ, your Son, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.

## *Reading (Lectio)*

Read the following Scripture two or three times.

### **Mark 1: 12-13**

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

<sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

## Meditation (Meditatio)

After the reading, take some time to reflect in silence on one or more of the following questions:

- What word or words in this passage caught your attention?
- What in this passage comforted you?
- What in this passage challenged you?

### Mark 1: 12-13

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness. <sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

*“This verse portrays the entire journey of prayer,” says Fr. Richard Rohr. “[Jesus](#) had to be driven into the wilderness, as do we all.” Few of us willingly want to sit in silence and face our compulsive, trivial and negative mind. “If you really sit in the silence and refuse to feed your compulsive... style of thinking, what comes up are... unhealed hurts, past unresolved relationships...all the things you don’t want to see about yourself.”*

Fr. Rohr talks about the need for the first stage of contemplation which involves observing one’s stream of consciousness, watching the mind’s thoughts come and go, ebb and flow. *“In about 30 seconds you will see repetitive, useless, trivial, paranoid thoughts”* the awareness of which, Rohr emphasizes, is painfully *“humbling.”*

## *Prayer (Oratio)*

Read the Scripture passage one more time. Bring to the Lord the praise, petition, or thanksgiving that the Word inspires in you.

### **Mark 1: 12-13**

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## *Contemplation (Contemplatio)*

Read the Scripture again, followed by this reflection:  
What conversion of mind, heart, and life is the Lord asking of me?

### **Mark 1: 12-13**

<sup>12</sup> And the Spirit immediately drove him out into the wilderness.

<sup>13</sup> He was in the wilderness for forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels waited on him.

# *Psalm 121*

<https://youtu.be/RxtMjBsN2FE>

# *Prayers*

Lord, have mercy, **Lord, have mercy.**  
Christ, have mercy, **Christ, have mercy.**  
Lord, have mercy, **Lord, have mercy.**  
Christ, hear us, **Christ, graciously hear us.**

God the Father of Heaven, **Have mercy on us.**  
God the Son, Redeemer of the World, **Have mercy on us.**  
God the Holy Spirit, **Have mercy on us.**  
Holy Trinity, One God, **Have mercy on us.**

Holy Mary, Mother of God, **Pray for us.**  
Holy Mary, Mother of The Pauline Order **Pray for us.**  
Holy Mary, hope for a better world, **Pray for us.**  
Holy Mary, unfailing help in our striving for holiness, **Pray for us.**  
Holy Guardian Angels, who watches over our consciences, **Pray for us.**

St. Paul, father of The Pauline Order, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, lover of solitude, **Inspire for us.**  
St. Paul, an example of Christian living, **Inspire for us.**  
St. Paul, mirror of poverty, **Inspire for us.**  
St. Paul, true model of humility, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, ornament of purity, **Inspire for us.**  
St. Paul, faithful servant of the Eternal King, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, refuge of the tempted, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, inflamed with divine love, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, totally dedicated to God, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, example of sobriety and abstinence, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, wholly trusting in God's Providence, **Inspire us.**  
St. Paul, summit of patience, **Inspire us.**

St. Paul, admired by St. Anthony, **Embolden us.**  
St. Paul, commending your spirit with hands raised to heaven, **Embolden us.**  
St. Paul, honoured after death with the service of lions, **Embolden us.**  
St. Paul, buried by St. Anthony, **Embolden us.**  
St. Paul, taken to heaven by the Angels, **Embolden us.**

That we may live in a spirit of faith, hope and love, **Enliven us.**  
That we may abound with good deeds in our daily life, **Enliven us.**  
That we may faithfully fulfil the duties of our state of life, **Enliven us.**  
That we may use the goods of this world with prudence, **Enliven us.**  
That we may unceasingly remember our death and God's judgment, **Enliven us.**

That we may follow the Crucified Saviour and be always faithful,  
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, **Spare us, O Lord.**  
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, **Graciously hear us, O Lord.**  
Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, **Have mercy on us.**

## *Apolytikion in the Third Tone*

Inspired by the Spirit, thou wast the first to dwell in the desert,  
In emulation of Elijah the Zealot; as one like the Angels,  
Thou wast made known to the world by Holy Anthony.  
O Venerable Paul, pray to Christ our God to grant us His great mercy.

## *Kontakion in the Third Tone*

We gather today and praise thee with hymns as an unwaning ray of  
the spiritual sun;  
For thou didst shine on those in the darkness of ignorance,  
And lead all men to the heights holy Paul,  
Adornment of Thebes  
Firm foundation of ascetics and fathers.

O God, who willed that St Paul achieved a high degree of sanctity through a life of solitude, prayer and penance in the desert, grant that through his intercession, we, who are striving to develop in ourselves the spirit of prayer and service, may come ever closer to you in love. We ask this through Christ our Lord.

**Amen**

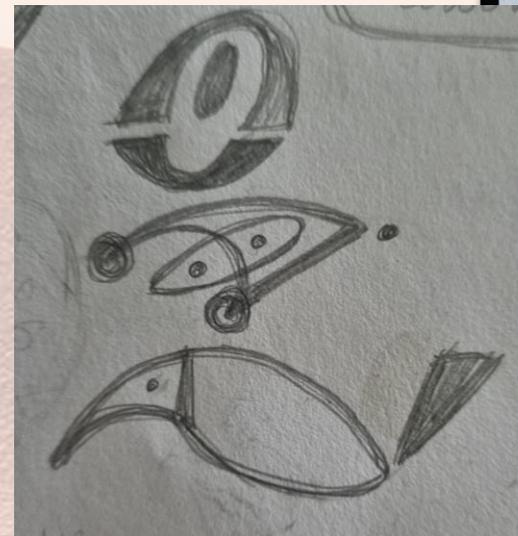
# Visio Divina

1. Examine the images slowly, noting the colours, people, places and things. Remain with the images for one to two minutes. If you would like, jot down a few words about the images in the chat.

2. Take a second, deeper, look. Where do you see movement in the images? What relationships do you see? Engage your imagination. Where are you in the artwork? What do you see from that perspective? What deeper meaning emerges?

3. Respond to the images with prayer. Did the images remind you of an experience, person or issue for which you'd like to offer thanksgiving or intercession? Offer that prayer to God.

4. Find your quiet centre. Breathe deeply. Relax your shoulders, arms and legs. Rest in this quiet. Let God pray in you. God prays beyond words.





*Silence*

Song

*In the Wilderness*

<https://youtu.be/FWTPH0mmFAk>

*A prayer for when you are in the desert.*

## Reflection

<https://open.spotify.com/episode/1B2EnqZduIRJ9KDAhAthXe?si=79af2f6916b8443a>

Let's Pray

Dear Lord, I know that wherever I am, You are with me—guiding, protecting, providing. You make a mountain into a way; You make streams flow in the desert; You cause a root to grow out of dry ground. Thank You for giving me the opportunity to see You work when all hope seems lost.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

# Setting an Intention for Lent

Today I'm choosing  
To break the chains of darkness.  
To loosen the ropes of burdens I don't have to carry.  
To embrace freedom in Jesus Christ.  
God, I'm asking for your guidance.  
How I need your light to show me the way.  
I need your righteousness to go before me.  
I need your glory to protect my back.  
Only You can satisfy in a dry desert land.  
Only You can provide the strength I need.  
Would you show me where you want me to serve?  
Make me a spring that never runs dry.  
Give me the wisdom to rebuild and restore  
That I might be called your servant-  
The repairer of broken walls.  
**Amen.**

# *Desert Song*

<https://youtu.be/c3l1z7bXY9Y>

## *Prayer to Begin Going*

*All:*

Loving God, stay with me during this hard time in the desert.

Also be close to everybody who is isolated during the epidemic.

Thank you for the gift of all the people who love me and of those whom I love, especially those from whom I am separated.

During these days show me how deeply you love me, and free me to love you more deeply.

I ask this through Christ Our Lord.

Amen.

# *Benediction*

<https://youtu.be/B8-qDTocptc>

## *Blessing and Sending*

Almighty God, Whose Son Jesus Christ suffered for us on the Cross that we might have eternal life, be present with us in our suffering as we endure the pandemic. Be present to the sick; be present to the dying; be present to the bereaved. We know that in your love all things shall be made whole. Strengthen in us that hope which comes only from faith in your unfailing love. This we ask through your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ, who reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, ever one God.

God who draws us to the wilderness  
to discover you and our own identity in the hard places and times  
Send us out sustained, shielded and fed by your hand to be people of the journey  
To offer hope when all seems lost,  
To live love when all have left,  
To give thanks and praise in all things,  
Bless us and the people we meet along the way.  
Father, Son and Holy Spirit.  
**Amen.**



You can give online at  
<https://holyhermits.com.au/give>

Next Contemplative Service  
Ash Wednesday 6.00pm same  
link!

Closing music: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWhijoudtvQ>