

The earliest Christian monks inhabited the desert land of the Middle East starting at the end of the second century AD. Known as the “Desert Fathers”, they left everything in search of knowing Jesus Christ. They wanted to commit themselves totally (body, soul, mind, and will) to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus with a profound holy zeal moving them to become ever more like Christ. These monks practiced integrity of character in order to remain in the state of constant humility that comes from knowing that they were loved by God. These monks sought most of all to experience union with God in the quiet of the desert and in the silence of their hearts. Here are some stories of these holy men.

*There once came thieves into an old monk’s cell, and they said to him, “Whatever you have in your cell, we have come to take.” And the monk said, “Take whatever you see, my sons.” So they took whatever they could find in the cell, and went away. But they forgot a little bag that was hidden in the cell. So the old monk picked the bag up, and followed after them, shouting and saying “My sons, you forgot this: take it.” But the robbers, marveling at the patience of the old monk, brought everything back into his cell, and they all did penance, saying one to another, “Truly, this is a man of God.”*

*One of the elders used to say of Lazarus the pauper (see Luke 16:19, 3), “He is not found to have practiced a single virtue. The only thing we find in him is that he never complained against the Lord for showing him no mercy but bore his affliction graciously. That is why God accepted him.”*

*A brother came to Abba Poemen and said to him, “I have many sinful temptations and am in danger from them.” The elder took him outside, into the open air, and said to him, “Inflate your chest and hold the winds,” but the young monk said, “I cannot do that.” The elder said to him, “If you cannot do that, neither can you prevent sinful temptations from coming in. Your task is to withstand them.”*

*‘If a man wants God to hear his prayer quickly, then before he prays for anything else, even his own soul, when he stands and stretches out his hands towards God, he must pray with all his heart for his enemies. Through this action God will hear everything that he asks.’*